

A CHRISTIAN ANALYSIS OF SUFFERING

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This dissertation is dedicated to the members of
the University Christian Church of San Diego, California,
for the unique educational opportunity which
they provided for me,
and to
my wife, Vicki, whose skill and loving support were
invaluable
and to
our children, Katie and Jesse, who faithfully endured.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation was written to systematically analyze the subject of suffering from a Christian point of view. A foundation was laid to establish the reality of human suffering. The sources of pain and mental anguish were identified as well as the general reactions to such suffering. The problem that suffering presents for the Christian (namely theodicy) was defined. Key words and concepts were clarified in the context of the theodicy debate. Many of the fundamental solutions to suffering and their subsequent variations were presented.

Evidence was given to establish the need for a clearer understanding of the Biblical witness in regards to suffering. Over two hundred and fifty passages from the Old and New Testaments were evaluated. From this research, nine different categories or perspectives on suffering emerged: retributive, disciplinary or educational, revelational, sacrificial and redemptive, illusory or transitory, meaningless, mysterious and eschatological. These categories were adapted from H. Wheeler Robinson, J. A. Sanders and others.

As a Christian, the author has expounded his own interpretation of human suffering. His solution was called a dialectical synthesis because it held contradictory elements in creative tension: Biblical perspectives, resurrection conviction, and the critical weight of contradictory evi-

dence, i.e. surd evil.

The methodology for accomplishing this task was divided into three phases. First, there was the phase of reading research. Materials that related to suffering in general, as well as pastoral - and theodicy-related materials, were thoroughly examined. Second, the historical-critical method of exegesis was indirectly applied to all of the passages. Third, there was practical and experiential involvement with those people who were suffering. Phase three ran the spectrum from group interaction to personal counseling.

The value of this dissertation was in the author's ability to integrate his seminary education into a life situation. But more, it offered an opportunity to work out a personal response to the problem of suffering; a problem which is frequently encountered in the pastoral ministry. Also this writing offered a coherent summary of the problem, of current theodicy solutions, and of the biblical perspectives with substantive support hereto not found in any other writing.

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INTRODUCTION

For a good part of my developmental years, I heard Christians speak of God and his will in most frightening ways. It had been his will that so and so should die. A small baby died because God wanted it for his own in heaven. That child was deformed to punish the parents for their pre-marital sexual relations. I was reminded of these theological moments when I read the following:

When I was in a hospital, a blind patient was taken for a walk one afternoon by an old lady, full of zeal and good works, who, unfortunately tried to improve the occasion by attempting to convert him to her brand of Christianity. She began by explaining to him that God had allowed him to be wounded in the arm and blinded for life first as a punishment for his past sins, and secondly by thus giving such a merciful reminder of his power over our lives to bring him back to loving obedience and sonship.¹

Many minds greater than mine have scrutinized this subject. Yet it still causes me to ponder what I think to be God's will and the nature of suffering. It is out of these inner deliberations that I have chosen to systematically analyze the subject of suffering from a Christian point of view.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to give a brief summary of the nature of suffering. Consideration

¹Gordon E. Childs, A Parson's Thoughts on Pain (London: Mowbray, 1933), p. 14.

will be given to the sources of pain and anguish as well as to the general reactions resulting from it. Suffering is caused by physical evil (floods, fires, etc.) and moral evil (abuse of human free will) among other things. The presence of evil creates a problem for the Christian, namely that of theodicy. This, too, will be explored.

With varying degrees of effectiveness, the scriptures, church tradition, reason, and revelation have guided and informed the Christian movement. The Bible, being a central spiritual resource, provides abundant material on suffering. Pertinent material from both the Old and New Testaments will be isolated and categorized. Following these biblical perspectives, I will offer my own understanding of the subject. The final section will be an application of these explanations to the congregation in its local setting. The main thrust is to assist Christians in interpreting their own experiences of suffering.

The methodology for accomplishing this task has been divided into three phases. First, there has been the phase of reading research. Hours were spent thoroughly examining materials that related to suffering in general, to theodicy and to pastoral ministry with those who suffer. Second, the historical-critical method of exegesis has been indirectly applied. It will not be used on any specific passage during the course of this writing; but it would be improper not to note its effect on my perception and inter-

pretation of biblical materials. The third phase involved practical and experiential research. This means that time was spent engaging those people who were suffering. Phase three ran the spectrum from group interaction to personal counseling. These three phases composed the methodology.

At the outset, I wish to note at least to biases. First, there is the fact that I have been a life-long participant in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), hereafter referred to as Disciples. Disciples are indigenous to the United States. Next to our confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Bible has been central to our self-understanding. Biblical interpretations have reflected an inductive method seasoned by common sense and expediency. Disciples have been anti-speculative and anti-theological in that we disvalued grand authoritative systems of understanding the Christian faith. In keeping with the frontier spirit in which we arose, Disciples have been slow to accept things we did not understand. The rank and file of our movement have commended themselves as being scriptural, sane and reasonable.

In light of this, formal theologies were not developed. Problems, such as suffering, were rarely dealt with in a systematic fashion. The Bible was the guideline for every Christian. Every believer had the freedom to interpret the Bible for himself. Such phrases as "No creed but Christ" and "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak;

where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent" loosely bound Disciple theology. This freedom in interpretation (a blessing and curse) made it difficult for me to establish a coherent identity with any theological depth. This may not have been the case for all Disciples, but there are many who would share my lack of development.² While I have a strong biblical background, I may reflect a lack of theological tools to facilitate a sound interpretation of difficult problems such as suffering.

Also, there is the bias of being a white middle-class American who was brought up in the post World War II era. I have not known the sufferings that are experienced daily by the majority of the world's population. Basic survival needs such as food, clothes, and shelter have never been a source of concern or of suffering. In many ways it is easier for me to be aloof from the practical pains of this topic.

The topic of suffering is enormous. It has been narrowed somewhat by dealing with a biblical analysis of the subject. To make it more manageable, the following topics will not be examined: the suffering of God, the suffering of animals, the suffering of angels, and suffering in hell. Furthermore, the problem of theodicy will

²I have written an unpublished paper which is devoted to a more detailed discussion of the difficulty of developing a Disciple theology.

only be identified. To attempt a solution of my own at this time would take us beyond the scope of this paper.

The value of this dissertation will be determined by the extent of my ability to integrate my seminary education with a life situation. But more than that, it offers an opportunity for me to work out a response to the problem of suffering; a problem which is frequently encountered in the pastoral ministry. Also, this will offer a coherent summary of the biblical perspectives of suffering as well as some of the more fundamental attempts to deal with the theodicy problem for the Christian. I am hopeful that this writing will open a new door for Christians to strengthen their faith by exploring such a universally experienced, but rarely examined problem.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING
THE FACTS OF HUMAN SUFFERING

Suffering is defined as the experience of something painful, unpleasant, distressful or injurious, either to oneself or neighbor. "If we ask the modern man what he means by the problem of suffering, he usually will answer in terms of the sorrow that comes from bereavement, the disappointment that results from frustrated aspirations and ambitions, and the physical pain that comes from sickness and accident."¹

In this chapter, evidences of human suffering will be briefly presented. The sources of such pain and anguish will be examined as well as the general human reactions to suffering. Since suffering presents a special problem to the Christian, namely theodicy, it, too, will be defined and analyzed. Let us examine a few examples of this problem.

The skies were dark and cold that Wednesday morning when the first bulletin flashed across the teletype. A tornado warning was in effect in a small portion of Kentucky. By the time that day was over, more than 100

¹Floyd V. Filson, "Partakers with Christ", Interpretation IX (October 1955), 400.

twisters would have indiscriminately danced death and destruction across sections of eleven midwestern states. Unbelievable winds killed 329 men, women and children. More than 4,000 people were injured. In this single day, an estimated 24,000 families were affected.

A boy named Randy was found not far from his home with his face cut and his body badly bruised. He cried out for his father and mother. None of the rescuers or nurses could bear to tell him that his parents and two sisters would never be there to comfort him.

Among the debris of the Christian Fellowship Church, a Bible was found blown open to the Psalms. The minister picked it up and read, "For we are consumed by thine anger and by thy wrath are we troubled."²

People were killed, maimed and left homeless by one of nature's recurring activities.

Earlier that same year another tragedy happened. The scene was a twenty-six floor bank in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Over five hundred of the bank's one thousand employees were at work in the upper fifteen floors, when the fire broke out. It spread rapidly from floor to floor. There was no automatic sprinkler system. Only the superstructure was fire resistant.

² Joseph P. Blank, "Day of the 100 Tornadoes," Reader's Digest, CV: 630 (October 1974), 105-110.

Employees were trapped when fire closed open stairways and cut the current to the elevators. From the smoky sky, bodies began falling like bombs. One such leaper landed on a fireman who was using a ladder to carry a woman to safety. The woman was paralyzed from the blow. She may never walk again.

Close to half of those who managed to get to the roof were roasted by flames that were fanned by high winds. Among those who were killed that day, one was a clerk who had just returned to the bank from her honeymoon. Another was a young secretary on her first day at the job.

Altogether 188 people died and another 235 were injured What caused the fire? Investigation showed that six window air conditioning units on the twelfth floor had not been properly wired. Although the manufacturer required that each unit be provided with its own fuse, only a single heavy-load fuse had been installed in the fuse panel. In addition, the low-quality electric wires leading from the fuse box to the air conditioners had been left spread loose on the false fiber ceiling. While the heavy fuse could bear the load, the wires could not. They overheated and caught fire.³

Suffering is real. It can happen to anyone at any time or place. No one is immune. Natural phenomena can be misdirected by human error to cause unnecessary physical pain and mental torment.

I officiated at the funeral of a young woman who was strangled to death. She was single, living with her

³James H. Winchester, "Skyscraper on Fire!" Reader's Digest, CV: 629 (September 1974), 74-9.

parents. Special education helped her become a very self-sufficient and productive individual. Within her personal limitations, she was just beginning to fulfill some of her God-given potential. She suffered death at the hands of another human being. Her family grieves from the loss.

There was no apparent reason for this young lady's death. No one was helped by her dying. Personal character and society's sympathetic moral fiber could be developed in a less wasteful method. This suffering was unnecessary.

Some difficult experiences in life are necessary to increase our capacity for living. The evolutionary struggle is reflected in the story of a young boy who was watching a chrysalis. A small crack appeared on the gray case revealing a creature struggling against its confinement. As it opened, the boy recognized the creature as a moth. He imagined it winging its way on the hot summer breezes. But the tiny creature seemed cruelly trapped. Thinking to help it, the boy carefully cut the chrysalis open. Instead of flying off, the moth fell to the ground, its wings ineffectual. It had not gained the maturity for flight that the struggle out of the case would have made possible.⁴

These four illustrations point to the fact that suffering is a genuine part of our earthly predicament.

⁴Lowell Russell Ditzen, The Storm and the Rainbow (New York: Holt, 1959), pp. 46-7.

Some pain is good because it is necessary for our development. There is no apparent reason or justification for other kinds of suffering. "The realities of suffering are common to us all, and it is not hard to feel a very real identification with those who have expressed their feelings about this common experience--no matter what their time or place or generation may be."⁵

Like the world's major religions, we have started with the facts of suffering as they are rather than with any theoretical problem.

Early mankind interpreted pains and discomforts from injuries as a deity's displeasure. At some unknown point of time people began to ask why they suffered as they did. This inquiry occurs more frequently when pain is personal. A depressed or conflicting social environment will also give rise to such a question. The special emphasis on suffering is not due to any change in the basic causes of it. Whether suffering occurs during war and depression or peace and prosperity, it arises from one of four sources, sometimes separately, but more often in combination. These sources are the laws that govern the natural order, the freedom which people inherently have to choose between alternatives, the interrelatedness that binds people together in

⁵John Bowker, Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 4.

a social structure, and the evolutionary elan of growth.⁶

Our legal terminology has classified this first cause of suffering (natural law) as an act of God. It is defined as "inevitable events happening by reason of the operation of nature unmixed with human agency or human negligence."⁷ Such happenings as tornadoes, lightning, floods, and earthquakes are classified as acts of God.

A system of laws governs the earth. Order is brought out of chaos by the laws within the system. People are hurt when they get in the way of one or more of these inflexible laws. These governing principles whose activities make the world habitable, also create havoc. A cool refreshing breeze becomes a destructive wind storm. The fire that warms us and by which we cook our food can also burn us. The earth is our firm foundation on which we establish our lives. Great pleasures and satisfaction arise from our relationship with the earth, until it shifts. Rain adds growth, but floods destroy plants, animals, people and property. "Unpleasant visitations of nature are not due to caprice or malice. They are accounted for by the inexorable operation of law....Nature works through laws that

⁶In Bergsonian philosophy the elan vital is the original life force - that creative linking principle in the evolution of all organisms.

⁷Ralph W. Sockman The Meaning of Suffering (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), p. 13.

hold to their purpose."⁸

The laws of nature are not disobeyed. Rather they are proven to be true. A carpenter who builds his house too close to the cliffs may cause death and destruction by his error in judgment. When the house slides off the cliff the law of gravity has not been broken but has acted.

"The laws of nature are compendious statements of fact; sequences of events which always happen; of particular force which always and everywhere produces a certain result. You cannot disobey it...it is self-acting."⁹

Throughout history chance has appeared to affect a great many lives for the good and bad. Chance means a succession of events which cannot be analyzed. "When we say chance we mean naturally to imply a chain of causation which we cannot analyze; there is properly no such thing as chance in a world controlled by natural law."¹⁰ Fortunately the world is affected by more than natural law.

Indeed the governing principles of the earth are dependable and orderly. Life would not have much longevity without stability. It seems far better to have a world of order, even if its laws produce suffering, than an unreliable world.

⁸Carl A. Glover, Victorious Suffering (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 14.

⁹Douglas White, Forgiveness and Suffering (Cambridge: University Press, 1913), p. 39.

¹⁰H. Wheeler Robinson, Suffering Human and Divine (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 110.

Imagine if the law of gravitation were unreliable. One person's life might be saved if he fell out of the tenth story window. But another twenty people might be killed by being indiscriminately pulled sideways or upward.

Even in man, we find that the reign of law is still operative. The proper functioning of a person's body is connected to a few simple rules related to eating, breathing, shelter, clothes, sleep and exercise. Health and disease generally follow fixed patterns. Good health is reasonably secured by those who co-operate with these principles. People who overwork or who are over-indulgent pay the penalty, thus proving the laws.

Disease can be cured or controlled by bringing other laws into play. One set of principles is used to override the negative effects of another set. "The doctor calls other laws into service. The healing art of medicine deals with a sphere in which man uses one set of laws to counteract the disastrous effects of other laws."¹¹ The principle is demonstrated by the use of digitalis. It is a deadly poison. Doctors have learned its uniform effects and put them to beneficial use with heart patients. A certain quantity of digitalis produces a particular result. It has been used for years to stimulate irregular hearts.

People are subject, by creation, to the operation of these laws because they are part of the physical scheme

¹¹Glover, p. 17.

of this planet. Like other creatures, a person's condition is affected by gravitation, chemical laws, and other elements present within this eco-system. We should note that the laws of nature bring joy as well as sadness. That is a fact we tend to forget in our morbid encounter with the problems of suffering. Most people cling to life despite its untimely disasters. They hold on because they find life good.¹²

A second major source of suffering results from human free will, which is the ability to make choices between alternatives, some good and others not so good. People are not puppets controlled by an invisible deity for his amusement. They are free agents following the dictates of their own minds and emotions.

God limits himself by creating people with freedom. The freedom of finite creatures involves grievous error and pain, as well as greater possibilities for achieving a higher good. It is one of the very essential conditions of our being human.

The revelation of his nature shows what seem to be limitations of his power in two ways: 1) in the realm where human free will operates and; 2) in the realm where human ignorance, folly or sin hold up his plans....these limitations God has himself imposed....This is not to deny his power, for we must remember that self-imposed limitations are an expression of power and not a denial of it.¹³

¹²George A. Buttrick, God, Pain and Evil (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 40.

¹³Leslie D. Weatherhead, Why Do Men Suffer? (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1936), p. 27.

Because this is a moral order, free will is both man's blessing and curse. If the achievement of the greatest good is to be realized, then it is granted that the possibility of moral evil is logically inevitable. A human being who is incapable of wrong is likewise incapable of right. There is no freedom in such circumstances.

With the possibility of greater good is the equal occasion for evil. Freedom enables people, by different ingenious methods, to inflict a great deal more pain than they otherwise could have done. This negative power has been exploited to the full. "Their history is largely a record of crime, war, disease, and terror, with just sufficient happiness interposed to give them, while it lasts, an agonized apprehension of losing it, and when it is lost, the poignant misery of remembering."¹⁴ Some of our problem could be avoided by a better use of our intelligence. We fall into a number of troubles by our thoughtlessness and carelessness as well as by hasty judgment, lack of tact, limited knowledge and wishful thinking.

Martin D'Arcy said that there is no meaning in freedom if the responsibility does not lie with the agent.¹⁵ The awfulness of responsibility and the glory of co-operation become apparent. God does not use coercion in response

¹⁴C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 14.

¹⁵Martin Cyclic D'Arcy, The Pain of this World and the Providence of God (New York: Longmans, Green, 1935), p. 52.

to a person's "no." Persuasive power or influence is how God reacts. "It is amazing how eternal, omnipotent God has so condescended to co-operate with man that apart from man he is helpless fully to reveal his nature or to accomplish his purpose."¹⁶ The scope of the gift of freedom is so magnificent that God hides his will behind it and reaches His ends through it instead of overriding it.¹⁷

Freedom helps to define human experience as a unique existence in distinction from plants and animals. Dogs, bushes, sand all exist. They are encountered in the earth's realm. Unlike animals and plants, persons are aware that they exist. "But so far as we know, only man is open to his being, in the sense that he not only is, but is aware that he is...."¹⁸

People are aware of their being and within certain limits are responsible for it. The evolving nature of the world has given man the capacity for self-determination. A person is not ready-made but is in the process of becoming a complete being. At any given moment, we are incomplete. "We are given an existence which stands before different possibilities of being, and among these it must reasonably discriminate...Because selfhood is not a ready-made 'nature' or collection of properties, but a potentiality that has to

¹⁶Weatherhead, pp. 28-29.

¹⁷D'Arcy, p. 82.

¹⁸John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 54.

be responsibly actualized...."¹⁹

Freedom and finitude are polarities which set the parameter of an existence. Freedom, and its consequential responsibility, are distinctive of the human predicament. A man stands before different possibilities for existing. But he never encounters a totally free situation. He lives in the world. His options are concretely connected to that earthly framework in which he finds himself. "Heredity, environment, and glands may condition a person, so that in some circumstances he tends to react in a certain fashion..."²⁰

Finitude is the opposite of freedom and it incorporates all of the givens of any particular existence. Temperament, skin color, nationality, intelligence and sex are a few of the unchosen givens of life.

Environment and heredity, our place in history and society, these contribute so much to making us what we are that the area of the possible is cut down, sometimes, it would seem, almost to vanishing point. Every freedom is balanced against a limitation, perhaps a limitation of power that prevents us from carrying out a policy, or perhaps a limitation of knowledge that frustrates our intention.²¹

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 55-6.

²⁰Glover, p. 23.

²¹Macquarrie, pp. 55-7. Macquarrie lists polarities of possibility and facticity, rationality and irrationality, community and individuality, and responsibility and impotence. The first polarity is the same as my designations of freedom and finitude. Rationality is the humanly characteristic ability to judge, discriminate, sift, understand and interpret. Irrationality is the dark side that is with us. Our intellects move in truth and at the same time untruth, error and deception. Irrationality keeps breaking in and threatens to disrupt all order. Every person is complete

So a source of suffering arises from a tension between freedom and finitude.

The most serious consequences from wrong choice result when people, who know good and evil, deliberately choose to do evil. Willful preference of evil is sin and sin entails suffering, affecting either the perpetrator, the victim, or the innocent spectator. Every wrong has social consequences because all people are members of society.

The third major source of suffering results from the interrelatedness of people. No person is completely self-sufficient. "The relationship that civilized people sustain to each other is so intimate, and the pressure of society to intense, that heartache and distress are inevitable."²²

Some people inflict suffering by carelessness or deliberate malice. Disaster can result from the careless behavior of a nurse who is tending to a patient. An overdose of medicine, or a shot given at the wrong time can increase suffering instead of relieve it. Great loss of life

and yet incomplete. Survival is based on communal existence. But each individual has a measure of privacy and autonomy. Responsibility is explained in terms of conscience which implies the self's own awareness of how it measures up to itself - how far it is failing or succeeding to realize its own possibilities for being. Impotence makes nonsense of the moral life and challenges the value of any aspiration. These four polarities account for the possibility of a greater good and for the more often actualized evil that results from a selfish choice.

²²Glover, p. 19.

has been caused by a concealed mistake in an airplane or automobile. An angry assembly worker purposely neglects to tighten a bolt. The subsequent crash is traced to that error but not to the workman. But suffering still results in either case.

Much suffering is caused by sheer cruelty and meanness. Gossip perpetrated by petty jealousy has generated much unnecessary heartache. Insensitive employers, foremen and supervisors have made tyrannical mountains out of trivial molehills. Men and women blinded by profit, power and prestige have crushed fellow workers like snails on a sidewalk.

Suffering grows out of our economic system. In a recession, a corporation may fall back on its capital reserve funds. When these are depleted, employees are laid off. The unemployed person and his family are adversely affected. Mental anguish occurs as well as physical suffering.

The gains of advancing societies have claimed their share of suffering. "Progress is a jealous mistress who demands her pound of flesh for every advantage she yields."²³ Blood, sweat and tears have been the exchange for advanced technology. Daily life is filled with the injuries and deaths of those in laboratories, mills, factories and on con-

²³Ibid., p. 21.

struction jobs. A contractor reports that the dam which will provide electricity for millions of people, cost two million dollars and twenty-five lives. Those who engage in furthering progress will suffer, as well as those who can not keep pace with the advances. "In the solidarity of society we are all bound together for evil as for good and all that lies in our power is to decide whether that enforced solidarity shall become by our choice a willing fellowship."²⁴

The intensity of suffering is proportionate to the degree of intimacy. If a stranger robs me, I may suffer physically or financially. If a friend injures me, then there is something added which may cause me more pain than the actual injury. And if my son were to take advantage of me, then this element of relationship would weigh heavier than any physical or financial damage. "Because and in proportion as love enters in, you are liable to this spiritual suffering, it is rooted in and grows out of the love which precedes it."²⁵ Few people would care to go through life without the privilege of intimate friendships, yet every close attachment is a potential source of sorrow.²⁶

The fourth major source of suffering lies in the nature of the evolutionary process. With every increase in

²⁴Robinson, p. 197.

²⁵White, p. 108.

²⁶Glover, p. 22.

creativity, there is an increase in sensitivity and therefore an increase in the potential for a variety of intense experiences, either pleasurable or painful. "One of the penalties the race must pay for its own development is that with spiritual sensitiveness and aesthetic appreciation there must go, hand in hand, a greater poignancy in painful experiences...it is better to be a man in pain than a cabbage in ecstasy."²⁷

There is more value in human growth even if it involves the inevitability of pain. The evolutionary movement has been in the direction of greater consciousness which expresses itself in terms of work and effort. "For the movement of life is upward, and man, precisely because he can reflect upon this movement, is able to experience both the difficulty of the ascent and the natural inclination to halt. There is indeed a joy in growth that distracts us from the pain, but it is always there."²⁸

With the creation of life came the creation of values. Rapid changes began shortly after creation. These changes were in the "direction of richer varieties of life, more possibilities of intensity of feeling (pleasure and pain), consciousness and freedom."²⁹ This was the actuali-

²⁷L. D. Weatherhead, Salute to a Sufferer (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 49.

²⁸C. F. Mooney, "Teilhard de Chardin on Suffering and Death," Journal of Religion and Health, IV (June 1967), 430.

²⁹John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 92.

zation of greater beings and hence greater values. The evolutionary process was a "first step" response to God's lure toward self-realization.

The world today mirrors God's previous influence but, because of innate self-love and freedom on the part of the creatures, it is not what God wanted it to be. God's power in this process rests in his ever-present persuasion toward his goals. He influences but does not coerce his creation since he has endowed it with genuine freedom. "If God did not draw us (by persuasion) toward an ideal in some tension with our other urges and desires, sin would not arise. We would simply do whatever we wanted to do. But there also would be no growth in sensitivity and no check upon the violent clash of self-interest."³⁰

At our birth, we are thrown into this evolutionary process, which has in it the desire to move forward, stand still and to go backward. Our participation with God's desire to create higher and richer values is a real one. We contribute to the success or failure of the total enterprise. Pain is unavoidable in such a relationship especially with the tension created by the call forward and the impulse to stand still or fall back. "... (W)e can well understand that, for the success of the total effort, pain is inevitable...the world is an immense groping, an immense

³⁰Ibid., p. 91.

search, an immense attack, it can only progress at the cost of many failures and much pain...Sufferers are simply the parts that pay for the progress and triumph of the whole."³¹

Greater values come into being as the result of this struggle. The fight for more abundant life is a contribution of God to the evolutionary movement. This implies that our existence is good. It is an experience to have being. Experiences of being vary in quality (richness, harmony and intensity). Greater value is given propositionally to higher quality experiences. Consciousness and freedom definitely increase the quality of experiences. Those existents who have awareness of being are more able to determine their actions and hence are of greater worth. Value is to be discovered in individual experiences.³²

God is calling forth some degree of self-love from every existent but only that degree which is harmonious with a balanced order among other self-loving beings. Obviously there arises a tension between the self-love of one being and that of another as well as between them and the order that is necessary for their existence. There is greater value when one existent sacrifices its self-love for another or for the sake of the whole. "...A tension may exist between the attainment of momentary satisfaction of a given entity and its contribution to the order requisite for other

³¹Mooney, p. 431.

³²Cobb, p. 93.

entities. ...The problem of evil (suffering) recurs at this point in the form of the recurrent destruction of greater values for the sake of lesser ones. The self-love of a malarial mosquito who can not but help feed on a human being is an example."³³

A good deal of the suffering on earth is the result of the inability of subhuman existents to be persuaded by larger concerns than self-satisfaction. Every sentient being is called forth by God with immediate self-love permeating its nature. Man appears to be the first existent who has the ability of unlimited concern for others, at least in theory. God urges man to realize this capability to the fullest extent. "But at all lower levels of the hierarchy of living things the capacity for concern beyond immediacy of satisfaction is far more limited. The malarial mosquito is incapable of concern for the man and hence unsusceptible to persuasion to spare human life at its own expense."³⁴

The mosquito loves itself and that is natural. A human being satisfies himself alone at the expense of others and that is sinful. "The evil involved when a man seizes immediate satisfaction at the expense of his own future and that of others is qualitatively different and far more terrible than the evil involved when the mosquito feeds upon a man."³⁵ Man's ability to perpetrate pain and anguish upon

³³Ibid., p. 94.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., p. 95.

other persons exceeds nature's combined ability to create the same. We have before us the capability and opportunity to cooperate with God or to annihilate the world.

The possibility of our resistance exists only where there are significant values. Consciousness, freedom, and a greater quality of life is balanced by the possibility of suffering. Warped self-love created sin and God provided the arena for it by creating good.

God's continuing involvement is not only that of seeking ever-higher values with their accompaniment of ever-greater evils, but also that he aims at the empowering of good in such a manner that the balance of good over evil will be enlarged and that he shares with us in the suffering that accompanies the existence he has given us.³⁶ These four elements either separately or jointly account for the evil and suffering we experience in the world.

Oh, a trouble's a ton, or a trouble's an ounce,
Or a trouble is what you make it,
And it isn't the fact that you're hurt that counts
But only how did you take it.³⁷

RESPONSES TO SUFFERING

There are many different reactions that result from suffering. In the introductory illustration of this chapter, it was noted that a minister's eye fell on a passage that

³⁶Ibid., p. 96.

³⁷Edmund Vance Cooke.

intimated that God sent the tornadoes to discipline his sinful people. When the young woman was murdered, friends and neighbors asked all kinds of questions which reflected their own reactions. Why should this tragedy befall her? Is this the will of God? Is it fate or an accident or bad luck?

People react differently to each new situation and may even do so within any given experience of suffering. We shall examine a few of these responses, remembering that more often than not, they are in combination with one another.

First, there is the reaction of pessimism. The pessimistic person expects the worst outcome in any circumstance. Suffering is no surprise. It is anticipated. There exists a variation which is referred to as positive or optimistic pessimism. The attitude reflects the same cynical slant. But it is different in that it hopes for the best and prepares for the worst. There is satisfaction found in the ability to cope with pain because one was ready for it. A difficulty arises when no accident or mishap occurs since the person has spent energy preparing for it. More often than not, the person can not be free really to enjoy such an accident-free occasion.

Second, there is self-pity. This type of reaction occurs after the initial shock is over. The painful experience is used to draw attention to the one who experienced

it. There is a new satisfaction in declaring the said details. One has only to think of persons who enjoy poor health. "They magnify their griefs in a bid for sympathy and find morbid satisfaction in feeling sorry for themselves."³⁸

Resentment is the third response. The sufferer is totally unprepared for any kind of difficulty. Such a person is incensed and indignant. Basically, he is unprepared to meet emergencies. So he indulges himself in resentment. "Why should this trouble happen to me? I pay my bills, my income tax, and work hard. Why am I singled out for this miserable mishap? The cards must be stacked against me." Finding no reason for it or any gain, the person claims that it's unjust.

The fourth reaction is one of wanting the world created without the possibility of suffering. "Why do we have to have this pain? It does not really add to our lives but only takes away." It appears that there has not been sufficient reflection upon suffering and pain. Since, as we have seen, it is necessary in some degree for genuine freedom and character building. "We want, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather - a senile benevolence who as they say, 'liked to see the young people enjoying themselves', and whose plan for the universe was simply

³⁸Glover, p. 29.

that it might be truly said at the end of each day, 'a good time was had by all.'"³⁹

The fifth response is a combination of resentment and an honest questioning of the tragic circumstances in respect to the problem of the distribution of suffering. In the Bible it is stated in the following way: "Why does the wicked man prosper and the righteous suffer." With or without the Biblical reference, it is easily discovered among people. For example, a young couple raises the question when they learn of the fact that they are not able to procreate children. Their next door neighbor is an irresponsible woman who is separated from her husband. She has eight beautiful children for whom she does not care. They run wild in the streets and are a nuisance to their mother and community. Why is this couple, who wants to give their love to children, unable to have any?

The sixth reaction is fatalism. Every event, good or bad, is considered determined and therefore inevitable. This view manifests itself in two classic sub-groups.

Stoicism is the first of these sub-groups. This is the attitude of accepting the facts of suffering and inwardly steeling oneself against them. "An Indian tribe in South America begins early to instill this attitude into its young, for as soon as a child is born the father greets it

³⁹Lewis, p. 40.

with these words: 'You are born into a world of trouble. Shut your mouth, be quiet and bear it.'"⁴⁰

Epictetus is probably the first in the Western literary tradition who clearly stated this point of view.

If heads of grain had feeling, ought they to pray that they should not be harvested. I would have you know that it is a curse never to die. The ship goes down. What then am I to do? Whatever I can. I drown without fear, neither shrinking nor crying out against God, but recognizing that what is born must also perish. For I am part of the whole, as an hour is part of a day. I must come on as an hour, and like an hour pass away. Regard yourself as but a single thread of all that go to make up the garment. Seek not that the things which happen to you should be as you wish, but wish the things that happen to you to be as they are, and you will find tranquility.⁴¹

Christian acquiescence is the second of these two kinds of fatalism. It is also referred to as meek resignation.⁴² All suffering is sent by God, and therefore is to be patiently endured without question. "It is the Lord: let him do what seems (to) him good" says Eli upon being informed of a terrible calamity about to befall his home (I Sam. 3:18). One who adopts this outlook makes no attempt to correct a possibly correctable situation nor does he use the experience to better interpret his world.

Ostensibly, this negates genuine freedom and responsibility. "A belief in fate accepts that whatever happens has been determined in advance by some sovereign power...a

⁴⁰E. Stanley Jones, Christ and Human Suffering (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), p. 44.

⁴¹Ditzen, p. 10.

⁴²Glover, p. 32.

true fatalism therefore excludes free will and thus human responsibility."⁴³

The seventh response is the denial of the reality of suffering. This perspective has its roots in solipsism which is the theory that the self can be aware of nothing but its own experience; hence nothing exists or is real but the self. "A few people have believed that pain has no real existence. The philosophic ancestor of this notion is solipsism, the doctrine that the outer world has no reality except our senses."⁴⁴

Suffering is connected to experiences of matter and matter is unreal. Pain and anguish are illusions to the mortal mind. "When that premise is granted it is a simple matter to reason as follows: Because suffering is associated with the flesh, and flesh is unreal, it follows that suffering is an illusion of the mind; therefore, one should disregard what one erroneously thinks is suffering."⁴⁵

⁴³Macquarrie, p. 223. "Suffering in the Qur'an - taking the concept of omnipotence seriously; suffering can't be a problem because the fact of suffering must necessarily be contained within the omnipotence of God. Suffering occurs only within creation, which is God's creation - and assuming that the universe has not got out of his control, then suffering is not out of his control either. Suffering may thus raise questions about the nature of God." John Bowker, "The Problem of Suffering in the Qur'an," Religious Studies, IV, (April 1969), 187.

⁴⁴Buttrick, p. 27.

⁴⁵Glover, p. 30, 31.

Finally, there is the reaction based on the belief that someone evil is responsible for the suffering. That someone is usually on a cosmic level and more often than not has been personified (i.e., Satan, devil, etc.). This cosmic character is the author of all malevolent experiences and therefore has divine status on occasion. This view is known as dualism.

The dualism of two gods, one benevolent and the other malevolent, was captured in the religion of ancient Persia known as Zoroastrianism. "Zoroaster (who lived in Persia about 1000 B.C.) proclaimed two rival gods, Ahura Mazdah (or Ormuzd), the source of good, the Angra Mainyu (or Ahriman), the source of evil...."⁴⁶ Mani, and later the Albigenses, lifted up a similar dualism within a Christian context.

There is a stream of biblical material to give one pause to ponder this dualism. "We know that we are of God and that the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (I John 5:19) is only one example.

In this first section we have examined the facts of human suffering by exploring the evidences, sources, and general reactions to pain and anguish. Let us turn now to the problem that suffering presents for the Christian.

⁴⁶ John Hick, Evil and the God of Love (London: Macmillan 1966), p. 31.

THE PROBLEM THAT SUFFERING PRESENTS FOR THE CHRISTIAN

Suffering, regardless of its cause, presents a problem to those of us who believe in God as revealed in the Bible. This complex problem may be simply stated. God is an omnipotent being and an omnipotent being could prevent all evil. He is also a morally perfect being, and such a being would want to prevent all evil. If God exists, evil would not exist. But evil exists. Therefore, God does not exist. This is one of the most serious challenges to faith in God - if not the most serious one.

Discussions that have engaged this problem have used the rubric of Leibniz. He was the first to use the term theodicy to denote the defense of God in light of sin and suffering. "It comes from the Greek θεός, God, and δίκη, justice. The word is a quick, handy way of addressing the defense of the justice and righteousness of God in the face of the fact of evil."⁴⁷

To some believers such a discussion would be ludicrous. It would be a foolish waste of time to judge and justify God by human standards. Certainly this topic can be approached in a careless or impious manner. But there are others who desire the truth; honestly and humbly seeking a better understanding of God and the world in which we live.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 6.

Before we engage the theodicy debate, it will be fruitful to define some key words.

(a) Good and evil. Both of these terms are usually defined in terms of a goal or purpose. A thing that is good contributes or enhances the movement toward the desired end, whereas evil distracts or destroys any forward progress. One of my professors defined evil as "something that should have been otherwise,"⁴⁸ or "anything which detracts from the greatest possible good realizable."⁴⁹

There are experiences in life that we welcome (good) and others that we wish to avoid (evil). "And the basic reference of good . . . is to that which we like, welcome, desire, seek, to gain or to preserve, . . ."⁵⁰ And evil includes "at a minimum, unbearable pain and suffering caused either by natural events or acts of other men, character defects, immoral acts, physical and mental deformity, the prosperity of rogues and the failure of honest men."⁵¹

John Hick adds further clarification of these two terms in the context of the theodicy debate. Let us begin with two pairs, right and wrong and good and bad, and say

⁴⁸David Griffin, "Philosophical Theology and the Pastoral Ministry," Encounter, XXXIII (Summer 1972), 232.

⁴⁹David Griffin, "Genuine Evil, Actual World, and Coherent Omnipotence" (unpublished), p. 6.

⁵⁰Hick, p. 12.

⁵¹Edward H. Madden and Peter H. Hare, Evil and the Concept of God (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1968), p. 5.

that right and wrong are moral terms, describing human volitions and actions, whilst good and bad refer . . . not to what we do but to the experiences that we undergo, and that evil is used in theodicy as a wider generic term covering both wrong volitions and bad experiences.⁵²

(b) Moral, physical (natural) and metaphysical evil. Moral evil is the result of human action which creates pain and mental anguish. It is often referred to as the abuse of free will. "Sin is the theological name for moral evil. Moral evil is evil that people originate: cruel, unjust, vicious, and perverse thoughts and deeds."⁵³ Moral evil is the "abuse of human freedom in the interests of the self."⁵⁴

Böse is the German word which refers to this type of evil. It includes sin of all kinds, from acts of wrongdoing to spectacular group transgressions like war.⁵⁵

Physical or natural evils are the destructive activity in nature like floods, fires, and drought. The Germans apply the word Übel to the occurrences that bring destruction and pain into life. "Physical evil could cover

⁵²Hick. These terms would be better used as adjectives rather than substantives. They describe qualities of experience.

⁵³Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁴Robinson, p. 66; D'Arcy, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁵James E. Sellers, When Trouble Comes (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 17; also Hick, p. 18.

all the apparent distortions in nature and, if you like, floods, tempests, tornadoes, earthquakes, jungles, deserts; but these are only bad in reference to life and above all, human life."⁵⁶ In a natural order without people there could be no good or evil. Evil comes about where there are projected plans and goals to be fulfilled. Only where there are sentient beings which work for the accomplishment of these goals can there be any good or bad events.

Whether indeed any kind of evil should be called "natural" is doubtful, but the expression is commonly used . . . to designate that kind of evil which is not attributable to human agency but arises from natural factors. Nevertheless it would seem that in judging these to be evil, there is reference to some human suffering as a consequence of them . . . It is true of course that there is also a vast amount of . . . waste and frustration that seems to have gone on in the evolution of the world and this might be called "evil" apart from any human involvement in it.⁵⁷

The distinction between natural or physical and moral evil is not absolute and not always clear. There are evils like famine, disease, and poverty that belong to both groups.

Metaphysical evil refers to the basic fact of finitude. It is the limitation that is placed upon creatures within the creation. This limitation or imperfection, as some see it, constitutes the source of much suffering. "The important point is that . . . certain imperfections are inevitable in a created and dependent universe, and

⁵⁶D'Arcy, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷Macquarrie, p. 233.

these inevitable imperfections are the source of many or all the evils that occur in it."⁵⁸

(c) Intrinsic, Instrumental, and Inherent good and evil. Within the theodicy debate, there are three other terms that will be used in understanding good and evil.

Intrinsic good is the first. It is an experience that is pleasant or likeable by the one having the experience. Likewise intrinsic evil is that which is disagreeable or not enjoyable. Physical pain, mental anguish, boredom and ugliness would fall into this category.

The second term is instrumental goodness. It refers to the actual consequences of an experience. Something is good instrumentally when it increases the intrinsic goodness of the existent. It is instrumentally evil when it causes intrinsic evil.

In evaluating an experience one must examine it for its intrinsic and instrumental value. Shame is intrinsically evil but in a certain situation may be instrumentally good. Or adultery may be experienced as intrinsically good but may be deemed instrumentally evil. All concepts and abstractions have instrumental value while only sentient beings are of intrinsic value. "Whereas only experiencing things are good or evil intrinsically, all things have instrumental value, e.g., abstractions such as red,

⁵⁸Hick, pp. 194-197.

triangularity, justice and greed. . . . each thing has multiple consequences, so a thing might instrumentally be good in some respects, and evil in others."⁵⁹

Inherent goodness is the third term. It refers to all "morally-approvable states of mind." Inherent evil would be the intention to do bodily harm to another person. Inherent good would be patience, courage, compassion, and endurance (inherent evil would be the opposite of these).

The distinction between these terms will be important for our clearer understanding of the solutions to the theodicy problem. For example, John Hick believes that certain inherent goods necessitate the existence of intrinsic evils (pain) and instrumental evils (causes of suffering). "And its value is to be judged, not primarily by the quantity of pleasure and pain occurring in it. . . . but by its fitness for its primary purpose, the purpose of soul-making."⁶⁰

(d) Surd evil. Surd evil is the term that is used for all unnecessary suffering and sin. That is to say, some suffering may warn us against further harm or even death. Some is balanced by the evolutionary process and human free will. But there appears in this world to be a great deal

⁵⁹Griffin, "Genuine Evil....," pp. 3-5. As far as I know, Dr. Griffin originated the use of intrinsic, instrumental and inherent. These were also discussed in his class, "God and Evil" Fall, 1974, at the School of Theology at Claremont.

⁶⁰Hick, p. 295.

of suffering that does not serve any purposeful end. "yet even when one allows for this educative instrumentality of natural evil, much that seems excessive, wasteful and just senseless remains."⁶¹

Surd evil was formulated linguistically by E. S. Brightman. Dysteleological surds were evils that could not be expressed in terms of any value; just as surds in mathematics are quantities which cannot be expressed in rational numbers ($\sqrt{5}$).⁶²

Surd evils have also been called *prima facie* gratuitous evil (Madden and Hare), genuine evil (Griffin), and dysteleological suffering (Hick).

It is agreed that the world must provide people with real tasks, challenges, and problems. But the tasks, challenges, and problems seem to be overwhelming even for the most capable person so as to be self-defeating. When a person over-indulges, there are severe bodily consequences. But are the extremes of cancer and leukemia necessary to keep one in line?⁶³ When a woman has hardening of the arteries and she remains in good health except for the loss of her mind, who has benefitted?

⁶¹Macquarrie, p. 237.

⁶²E. S. Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), p. 316. Quoted by Madden and Hare, p. 108.

⁶³Hick, pp. 365, 366.

In the opening pages of this chapter, three evidences of suffering were given. If the tornado did come as a punishment, did it bring conversion in many lives? Could the same result have been achieved by a less destructive method? And did, in fact, the ends justify the means? The fire safety codes may be changed because of that tower fire. But could that have been brought about with fewer deaths and more property damage? Is the gain counterbalanced by the cost of such great loss? It is ludicrous to think that someone's character is enhanced by the senseless death of an innocent woman. There is, indeed, a great deal of unnecessary suffering.

(e) Pain. The Greek word for pain is πόνος which also means labor, misery, and anguish. Pain has been regarded as a discipline sent by a deity to punish, chasten, teach, guide, or correct an individual or group of people.

On a biological level, it is nature's danger signal. The healthy and proper functioning of a body part seems to coincide with pleasure or contentment. Pain is a warning that something is wrong.

"Pain has been provided, primarily, as a safeguard to health. Pain flashes a warning to the brain that something is wrong It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that without pain our animal ancestors would have been exterminated before the evolutionary process became

consumated in man."⁶⁴

Intense pain is an important factor in the awakening of self-awareness. The existence of my self is undeniably asserted by that which I feel so intently as mine.⁶⁵

There are three elements in the nature of pain. Pain is caused by the impact of certain stimuli upon a highly sensitive nervous system which seems to be inherent with the development of special parts of the brain. This development allows for the projection of hurt through our memory of the past and suspected foreknowledge of what is to come. In turn, this enables us to be sympathetic and empathetic regarding the suffering of other people.⁶⁶

It is not each single sting of pain taken by itself which makes up that intensity of suffering we feel, but it is the second coming after the first, and the third as succeeding the first and the second; we carry all the past into the present and find that present in the expectations of the future becoming rapidly unendurable.⁶⁷

Pain is experienced in two different ways. First, there is the sensation conveyed by specialized nerve fibers that call attention to themselves, whether it is hurtful or not. For example, an athlete's legs may ache after he or she has participated in a sports event. Second, there is the sensation that is immediately disliked, whether mental or physical, by the existent. Experiences in the former

⁶⁴Weatherhead, Why Do Men Suffer?, p. 48.

⁶⁵Robinson, p. 21.

⁶⁶Weatherhead, Why Do Men Suffer?, p. 57.

⁶⁷D'Arcy, pp. 62, 63.

sense become pain in the latter sense when they are elevated above a certain level of intensity. However, sensations of the second order need not be sensations of the first order. "Pain in the latter sense is synonymous with 'suffering, anguish, tribulation, adversity, or trouble.'"⁶⁸

In many respects, pain is beneficial. It is a sign of life, warning of injury and possible further damage to a body member. It may be experienced at times with a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction. But it is often harmful.

"In most cases, it is liable to exceed in an immense degree the amount which is needful to secure its beneficial influence."⁶⁹ Life is filled with unnecessary suffering. Pain and anguish ostensibly serve no useful purpose - now or in the future. Our lives are oriented more toward pain than pleasure. "And not only is life in many cases crowded with useless or excessive pain but our sensibility itself seems to be more developed for pain than for pleasure. Intense enjoyment can last but for a short time and when once the limit of fatigue is reached, the pleasure itself may become a source of torture; but pain may continue undiminished, or even grow."⁷⁰

Pain often paralyzes instead of stimulates and reduces to impotence energies of the utmost value.⁷¹

⁶⁸Lewis, p. 14. ⁶⁹Robinson, p. 35. ⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹James Hinton, The Mystery of Pain (Boston: Wolfe, Fiske, 1890), pp. 39-40.

It should be noted that all pain worth designating as suffering is evil. It is something that ought not to be. Many people have believed that present pain comes from sin. "All pain hence suffering comes from sin - either our present sin or somebody else's sin in the past."⁷² Clearly, pain does come in part from the past, from our own past in this mortal life, and from the history of the race (i.e., effects of war).⁷³

However, not all suffering is the result of our personal sin. This has been discussed earlier in this writing under the sources of suffering. Pain arises from sin, natural environment, human relationship, and the evolutionary nature of the world.

In this section, I have defined words that will be useful in our understanding of the theodicy problem. Let us focus our attention on that complex subject.

When God is defined, it is usually assumed that he is all powerful, all knowing, and perfectly good, among other things. Within the confines of our problem, the question arises of how can pain, suffering, and evil be accounted for within God's realm.⁷⁴

⁷²Buttrick, p. 31. ⁷³Ibid., p. 29.

⁷⁴Madden and Hare, p. 3. If God is unlimited in power and goodness, why is there so much *prima facie* gratuitous evil in the world? If he is unlimited in power, he should be able to remove unnecessary evil, and if he is unlimited in goodness, he should want to remove it, but he does not. Apparently he is limited either in power or goodness or does not exist at all.

The following syllogism will isolate the problem:

- 1) God by definition is an omnipotent being.
- 2) An omnipotent being could prevent all evil.
- 3) God by definition is a morally perfect being.
- 4) A morally perfect being would want to prevent all evil.
- 5) If God exists, evil would not exist.
- 6) Evil exists.
- 7) Therefore, God does not exist.⁷⁵

This problem at hand is a formidable one. Theodicy is the single greatest threat against belief in God and is not to be taken casually.

To gain a clearer grasp of the situation, we shall briefly analyze one of the recent debates on the problem. Then the most fundamental responses to this difficulty will be systematically presented.

The Christian can easily see the forceful logic of this syllogism and may seek to resolve it by rejecting one of its seven premises. Earlier in this writing a case was made for the existence and reality of evil. Obviously, premise number six would not likely be challenged. Most frequently Christian apologists endeavor to reject premise five by denying one or more of the other premises (1-4). By opposing numbers one or three, one denies God's perfection and hence his worshipability.

Current debate has focused on the problem of the Christian who believes both that God is all powerful and morally perfect and that evil exists.

⁷⁵Griffin, "Genuine Evil...", p. 1.

It has been proposed that there is a logical contradiction in the syllogism. The contradiction is in the juxtaposition of an all-powerful and morally perfect God on the one hand and the facts of evil on the other.⁷⁶ Those opponents of this view (Nelson Rida, M. B. Ahern) submit evidence that a morally perfect being would on occasion allow or even cause evil, when this is done for a compensating good, hence rejecting premise number four. For example, in the human realm, a surgeon cuts off both legs of a particular patient, causing great pain and subsequent suffering. But the action saves the person's life in the process. Applied to our problem, God has "morally sufficient reasons"⁷⁷ for permitting or initiating some evils, even though the Christian cannot prove this a fact. Opponents of the logical contradiction state that it is not necessary to show that this is probable, but only that it is a possibility that God could have compensating reasons for evil. Since they (like Ahern) were first responding to criticism regarding their belief in logically incompatible premises (i.e., omnipotent and morally perfect God on the one hand and evil on the other), it was not necessary to show probability but only possibility.

⁷⁶J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" in Nelson Pike (ed.) God and Evil (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 47. H. J. McCloskey, "God and Evil", in Pike, p. 61.

⁷⁷N. E. Pike "Human Evil", in Pike, p. 88.

The argument against this theistic inconsistency involves the fact that intrinsic evils (pain, anguish) and instrumental evils (causes of suffering) are logically necessary preconditions for the existence of certain inherent goods (perseverance, compassion, etc.).⁷⁸ It is conceivable that all the world's evils are logically necessary for compensating goods. One is justified in permitting or initiating evil if it is designated to create a compensating good and if the good cannot be accomplished without the evil.

Something is evil if it is intrinsically evil, judged to be inherently evil or the cause of some intrinsic evil.⁷⁹ This applies to those things that are deemed bad in our spontaneous judgment. This is *prima facie* evil which means that the immediate evidence is adequate to establish a fact of evil. Nothing then can be regarded as simple evil. The intrinsically evil experience of suffering may lead to compassion or honesty (instrumentally good). The inherent evil intention to kill may lead to a new consequence of valuing life (finding life valuable). A thing like eating may be instrumentally good in one respect and may be instrumentally evil in another (gluttony). "Many

⁷⁸Hick, p. 294f; J. S. Whale, The Christian Answer to the Problem of Evil, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1936), pp. 35-38, 44f.

⁷⁹Griffin, "Genuine Evil...", p. 6.

things considered good within a limited context may be regarded as evil in a larger context and vice versa, due to the indefinite range of instrumentality; since the intrinsic and/or inherent goodness to which they eventually contribute is deemed sufficient to outweigh the immediate evil."⁸⁰ "Only apparent evil" designates this type of understanding since it only appears to be evil in a limited situation. Thus the attempt to reject premise number four is now seen to be an attempt to reject premise number six.

Genuine evil⁸¹ is anything which detracts from the greatest possible good realizable. This would include *prima facie* evil that is not both necessary for and a contribution toward some compensating good. It also refers to anything considered good in a limited context which contributes to an evil outweighing the immediate good.⁸² In addition, this would imply that any good which by its existence prevented the possibility of a greater good from being realized would be genuine evil. Granting some cases of only apparent evil still leaves us with many other cases of genuine evil. The logical contradiction, though refined, still exists.

With this discussion, we can rework our syllogism into the following form:

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Genuine evil=surd=dysteleological=*prima facie*; Gratuitous=unjustified=superfluous.

⁸²Griffin, "Genuine Evil...", p. 7.

- 1) God refers to a perfect reality.
- 2) A perfect reality would have perfect power.
- 3) A reality with perfect power would be able unilaterally to prevent all genuine evil.
- 4) A perfect reality would be morally perfect.
- 5) A morally perfect reality would want to create as much good as possible while preventing all genuine evil (that evil which is not necessary for the chief goal of creating the most good).
- 6) If there is genuine evil in this world, then God does not exist.
- 7) There is genuine evil in this world.
- 8) Therefore, God does not exist.⁸³

A brief summary of the current reactions will be presented. Its purpose is to enlighten the reader as to the many different solutions that have been offered to the problem of logical contradiction as presented in the reformed syllogism.

When most Christian apologists affirm the reality of evil, they are referring to *prima facie* evil. Their arguments take root in the fact that all *prima facie* evil might be "only apparent" evil. They may be seeking to reject premise five of the reformed syllogism but actually end up rejecting premise seven. Those who think, like N. E. Pike, that there is not a problem of logical contradiction are thinking in the framework of *prima facie* evil. Those who affirm the contradiction are rightly thinking of genuine evil.

⁸³Griffin's syllogism improved through class discussion, God and Evil, Fall, 1974, School of Theology at Claremont.

There have been attempts to evade the problem. When a person becomes a believer he/she has made a commitment which determines a theological environment which cannot be penetrated by outside criticism.

It is true that religious faith lacks objective, rational proof. But it does not follow that objective rationality is the standard by which all things must be judged, religious faith included. The two above theories may prove that human freedom and divine omnipotence cannot co-exist. But they do so only on an assumption which the knowledgeable religious believer would deny. This assumption concerns objective reason itself - its capacity to pass judgment on all things. For both the above arguments assume that . . . it is possible for men to step outside that relation, to become an impartial bystander and thus to discover the truth.⁸⁴

This distinction is continued in the statement that one must "believe in God" rather than "believe in the existence of God". This intimate, personal encounter puts the individual into a new frame of reference where the problem of evil does not exist. The norm of logic emerges within the boundaries of "ways of living or modes of social life". They only are intelligible within their particular boundary. "Science, for example, is one such mode of life and religion is another, and each has criteria of intelligibility peculiar to itself. 'So within science or religion actions can be logical or illogical; in science, it would be illogical to refuse to be bound by the results of a properly carried

⁸⁴Emil Fackenheim, Quest for Past and Future (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 199-200.

out experiment; in religion, it would be illogical to suppose that one could pit one's own strength against God's, and so on.'"⁸⁵

There are those who seek to deny the problem as we have seen in the discussion of the logical contradiction. This misconception is perpetuated by confused arguments and poorly understood concepts. "Assuming the general meaningfulness of religious assertions they try to show that the riddle of God and evil is a pseudo-issue, resulting either from confused arguments or misused concepts."⁸⁶ Charles Hartshorne is one who believes that the existence of God has wrongly been treated as an empirical question. He sees it rather as a metaphysical necessity. Hartshorne also believes that there has been a grave misunderstanding regarding the definition of God's all-powerful nature.⁸⁷

There is no consensus among these writers as to what is misused, misunderstood, or confused. "The writers . . . are not applying a general meaning criterion to the problem of evil, but each finds some confusion indigenous to that specific problem. What they find amiss is always

⁸⁵Peter Winch quoted by Madden and Hare, p. 22.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 37.

⁸⁷Charles Hartshorne "A New Look at the Problem of Evil," in Frederick C. Dommeyer (ed.) Current Philosophical Issues (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1966), pp. 201-212; also a class lecture where he spoke at the School of Theology at Claremont, Fall, 1974.

quite different."⁸⁸ But each author still denies that the problem of evil is a real one.

A very popular view is established around the belief that all *prima facie* evil is not ultimately genuine evil. This fundamental belief has different nuances.

The idea that evil is necessary as a contrast to the good is one variation. Human beings will be able to understand and appreciate the good only when it is seen in dramatic contrast to evil. White, therefore, is best understood in contrast to black. Hot is perceived amidst cold. Pleasure is properly enjoyed only in juxtaposition to pain. "If my suspicion is true, then I vote for the universe we have where we have our joy that has been made real by our suffering as the silence of the night is made real by the sounds of the day."⁸⁹

Another variation is that evil is a necessary by-product of the laws of our universe. When these laws are viewed in a general, over-arching way, their results are beneficial. God created this lawful world with its overall good results realizing the inherent calamitous effects.

". . . (I)n spite of what appear to be defects . . . in the world, the universe not yet finished has been

⁸⁸Madden and Hare.

⁸⁹Allen Paton, "Why Suffering", in James F. Andrews (ed.) Creative Suffering (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970), p. 15.

planned by a mind of infinite power and infinite goodness for the greatest good of the greatest number."⁹⁰

For centuries, evil has been interpreted as punishment for sin. This view has been adequately established in the Old Testament by Job's comforters and the deuteronomic writers. (See Genesis 3:16-19; Leviticus 26:14ff; Numbers 14:18; Job 4:7-9; 8:3, 4, and 11:1-6.) All pain and suffering is the direct result of personal or collective sin by this generation or a previous one. This retributive view has been refined through the years. It surfaces in the question of unequal distribution of pain, e.g., why do the innocent suffer? (See Psalms 37:1f; 73:3; Jeremiah 12:1f.)

Suffering is the method by which God tests people and hence uses their faithful witness to inspire others. Therefore, pain has a purpose and is not meaningless. This particular response to the theodicy problem has an immediate difficulty when one realizes that not all people are faithful, and affliction tends to drive them away from God. It will be discussed in detail in the next chapter under the probationary and evidential perspective.

Theodicy errors are cleared up when evil is understood as God's warning to his people, is another view. Physical evil is noted as jolting many a backsliding be-

⁹⁰Weatherhead, Why Do Men Suffer, p. 93.

liever back to the straight and narrow. The unbeliever is overwhelmed by God's power as displayed in natural catastrophes. The resultant reverence, awe, and fear are sufficient justification for the evils that God causes.

A slight variation of the first two views listed is derived from the assumption that this is the best of all possible worlds. The present world is best because it contains the minimum amount of evil compatible with the creation of any world. To think of "a world" is to include in it the opportunity for suffering. It is logically impossible for any finite thing to be perfect. "A world" is a finite thing. Creation entails evil and imperfection. "If we allow that the basis on which God has arranged human life is the best, we cannot complain about those inescapable, painful consequences which flow from that basis - even when they appear so distressing as to seem to deny the love and power of God."⁹¹ Essentially, God did the best that he could by creating a world with the least amount of genuine evil in it. The degree of surd evil is proportionate with there being any world at all.

Another variation of the theme that evil is necessary is based on the belief that all's well in God's view.⁹² Just as a chord in music may sound dissonant when isolated,

⁹¹Weatherhead, Salute to the Sufferer, pp. 37, 38. Leibniz is credited with this idea of the best of all possible worlds.

⁹²Madden and Hare, pp. 60-62.

so it is with evil. When evil is seen in its proper place, from God's view, it will be like harmonious music. "The other way is to explain evil as necessary to the good of the whole. The blot is essential to the painted picture."⁹³ From a human standpoint, evil is intrinsically and inherently real, but from God's ultimate perspective it is all instrumentally evil (e.g., leading to a greater good). "There are a thousand ways of justifying the conduct of God. All the disadvantages we see, all the obstacles we meet with, all the difficulties one may raise for oneself, are no hindrance to belief . . . and there is nothing so exalted as the wisdom of God, nothing so just as his judgment, nothing so pure as his holiness and nothing more vast than his goodness."⁹⁴

C. S. Lewis has a unique way of conceiving of this understanding on a very practical basis.

In the fallen and partially redeemed universe we may distinguish 1) the simple good descending from God, 2) the simple evil produced by rebellious creatures, and 3) the exploitation of that evil by God for His redemptive purpose which produces 4) the complex good to which accepted suffering and repented sin contribute. A merciful man aims at his neighbor's good and so does 'God's will', consciously cooperating with the 'simple good'. A cruel man oppresses his neighbor, and so does simple evil. But in doing such evil, he is used by God, without his own knowledge or consent, to produce

⁹³Whale, p. 22

⁹⁴Gottfried W. Leibniz, Theodicy (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 68.

the complex good - so that the first man serves God as a son and the second as a tool.⁹⁵

In addition to the view that all's well in God's view is the notion that all's well that ends well. Persons, seeing only short run consequences, fail to understand that present evils eventually lead to important goods. God sees the overarching consequences and understands that they compensate for the evils which occur along the way. Obviously, God arranged that it should happen in this fashion. Evil is not an illusion as with the previous view. In this perspective evil is real but justified in the long run. "His will, his yearning is to see each life completed in harmony and beauty. But he allows a world of choice and consequences, a world where to grow in understanding and goodness one must pay the price of hard effort and perhaps know, too, the depths of pain and sorrow."⁹⁶

Augustine is generally credited with another view that evil has no being of itself. Evil, then is the absence of good. It is the corruption of a substance. "For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? . . . disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; . . . for the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshly substance - the flesh

⁹⁵Lewis, pp. 110, 111. Also see Ditzen, p. 11, "He allows it - for purposes that we can perceive only in part."

⁹⁶Ditzen, p. 12.

itself being a substance, and therefore something good, of which those evils - that is privations of the good which we call health - are accidents."⁹⁷

Included in Augustine's understanding is the principle of plenitude. Creation involves different levels of excellent existence. Austin Farrer is one author who has used this principle to deal with the problem of evil. God desired to have beings who were able to know and love him. Therefore, the world was initiated to accommodate the ascending levels of beings.

"He simply began his creation at the greatest remove from his own perfection and built it up from there toward himself, that being the best and most fertile method."⁹⁸ The essential cause of evil, according to Farrer, is the mutual interference of systems. Anything that exists, by its very nature, interferes with the autonomous movement of other systems. A world such as ours with natural forces and living creatures has inherent in it this mutual interference problem. To eliminate this evil would be to cut out the "worldliness" of the world. A world like this, which was better than nothing at all, was God's decision.

⁹⁷Augustine, The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love (Chicago: Regnery, 1961) p. 11.

⁹⁸Austin Farrer Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited (Harmondsworth: Fontana Library, 1966), pp. 65-73.

Another perspective is that evil is necessary for building human character and making a soul. The real difficulties of this world are necessary for creating spiritually significant beings. In an existence without sorrow there would be no occasion for courage, endurance, love, and compassion. Human beings are in the process of rising to a level of divine intention. These struggles are steps that form the staircase. "The value judgment that is implicitly being invoked here is that one who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations and this by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created ab initio in a state either of innocence or of virtue."⁹⁹

It is interesting to note that Hick points out that excessive or dysteleological suffering (genuine evil) exists and that there is no apparent explanation for it. Also, he admits "so far as we can see, the soul-making process does, in fact, fail in our world at least as often as it succeeds."¹⁰⁰

Implicit in the previous solutions was the fact that they sought to solve the problem of physical evil.

⁹⁹Hick, p. 291, detailed discussion pp. 279-398.
¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 372.

The solutions mentioned are not sufficient to address themselves to the problem of moral evil, though there may be one or two who attempted this. The next two perspectives on the problem will seek to solve moral evil. However, their immediate weakness is that they offer nothing to deal with physical evil.

Moral evil involves both the debasement of personality and the infliction of pain and suffering on fellow creatures. Why does God permit us to do such destructive things to ourselves as well as to others?

Our next solution is an orthodox one in that it views persons as sinful by nature, deserving eternal punishment. This sinfulness explains our destructive behavior. Those who hold this view explain that Jesus the Christ suffered and died on the cross in order to atone for each person's sinfulness and to redeem him from his justly-deserved eternal punishment. A saved person is rescued from evil and suffering. However, no attempt is made to explain why there was such a predicament in the first place. More often than not, this view reverts back to the retribution solution which views evil as punishment for sin.

Closely associated with this is the view that Christ overcame the evil in the world but he did not come to explain it. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was God's seal on the doom of evil. We are not given any

explanation, but we are given a victory.¹⁰¹ This harkens back to the understanding of the ultimate harmony in God's view.

The most fundamental response to the problem of moral evil centers around a person's freedom. One understanding is that the omniscient creator knew that man would wilfully choose the wrong occasionally if he had free will. But God granted freedom of choice because not to do so would have produced greater evil. A robot world without freedom would be less good than a world with freely choosing persons even if they rebelled.¹⁰²

After much debate, this view was reformulated. It now stated that free will was both intrinsically and instrumentally good; that is to say that freedom produces more good consequences than evil ones. It is difficult to determine that freedom produces more desirable consequences. Why is it that we are wanting to change this world?

Finally, God created people with the freedom to choose and the power to understand. Evil results when a person makes an uninformed decision. Descartes explains that man's will is more aggressive while his understanding

¹⁰¹Buttrick, p. 126.

¹⁰²See Charles Jounet, The Meaning of Evil (New York: Kenedy, 1963), and Jacques Maritain God and the Permission of Evil (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966). This view would be true of other Thomists.

is more passive. Decisions are made regarding those things which are not understood. Hence, life is turned from good to evil via mistakes. Evil can be eradicated by my ability to only make decisions which are informed by my understanding.¹⁰³

The last perspective on the theodicy problem is formed by those who believe that there is no solution possible. ". . . (T)his study strongly suggests that there is no valid solution of the problem" ¹⁰⁴ "(T)he more popular and philosophically more significant of the many attempts to explain this unnecessary evil are completely unsatisfactory."¹⁰⁵ Madden and Hare offer this keen observation regarding past, present, and even future solutions.

The answer is clearly that there is not only no evidence for the likelihood of such success but that the repeated failures, the recurrence and clustering of criticism, the permutations of basic mores which have been found wanting and the slight variations of old favorites count heavily against the likelihood of what no one denies is always a possibility.¹⁰⁶

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, evidence was submitted to establish that pain and mental anguish resulted from natural law,

¹⁰³Rene Descartes Meditations (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960), pp. 51-52.

¹⁰⁴Mackie, p. 84.

¹⁰⁵McCloskey, p. 84.

¹⁰⁶Madden and Hare, p. 14. I have relied upon Madden and Hare most heavily during the writing of this section since their treatment is so concise and pointed. I have made no effort to deal with their quasi-theism category.

human free will, human relationship and the evolutionary nature of the world. General reactions to suffering were briefly outlined as an introduction to the theodicy problem. With a definition of theodicy, many of the more fundamental solutions and their subsequent variations were presented. There was no attempt to offer individual criticisms or evaluations of these different views. Obviously, some were less adequate than others.

Through this research, it became evident that no one attempted to understand the Biblical perspectives on suffering. One or two solutions were sometimes isolated as the Christian solution, which is incorrect. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to examine nine different Biblical perspectives on pain, suffering, and evil, in order to better understand the problem from a Christian point of view.

CHAPTER II

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO ESTABLISH CATEGORIES

Throughout my research, I have observed, particularly in the theodicy section, frequent reference to "the Christian understanding of suffering", as if it were one view. Likewise, some authors have authoritatively stated "the Old Testament view" or "the New Testament view" regarding the problem of physical pain and mental anguish. Closer investigation discovers many different views in the biblical record.

Biblical perspectives on suffering were first categorized by H. Wheeler Robinson. His list has been expanded to varying degrees by J. A. Sanders, G. Clinard, M. Ferguson, and F. X. Cleary.¹ I have drawn upon these resources to establish nine categories or perspectives on suffering within the Bible. Suffering may be interpreted as being: retributive, disciplinary or educational, probationary and/

¹H. Wheeler Robinson, Suffering Human and Divine (New York: Macmillan, 1939); James Alvin Sanders, "Suffering as Divine Discipline in the Old Testament and Post-Biblical Judaism," Colgate Rochester Divinity School Bulletin, XXVIII, Special Issue (November 1955); Gordon Clinard, "Biblical Preaching on Suffering", Southwest Journal of Theology I (April 1959), 17-25; Milton Ferguson "The Problem of Evil and Suffering", Southwest Journal of Theology, V (April 1963), 7-20; Francis X. Cleary, "Biblical Perspectives of Suffering", Hospital Progress (December 1974).

or evidential, revelational, sacrificial and redemptive, illusory or transitory, meaningless, mysterious, and eschatological. It is the purpose of this chapter to define and exemplify each biblical perspective.

Three questions have been applied to establish support for each category. First, was suffering the main thrust of the text? Second, was suffering referred to in the passage? Third, was suffering implied by the context of the writing? In each situation it was asked how does this writer understand and interpret suffering. The perspectives were established in my mind before I examined all of the data. Therefore, I may have missed some new insights by my preconception.

The term perspective is applied to the general designations because "it suggests that there is a certain point of view in the subject who is performing the viewing or feeling. But it also implies that this is not completely described by this slant or point of view."²

The Bible has been taken by many Christians as one basic authority for life. Indeed, it provides a stability within the family of faith because of its fixity and objectivity. It helps to preserve an identity. Yet it must be remembered that this fellowship is not based on a book but rather on a living faith within a special community. Faith

²Seward Hiltner, Preface to Pastoral Theology (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 18.

came before the book. The Bible bears witness to those who have experienced the faith. It was the fellowship which determined the canon of scripture. The Scriptures may be best interpreted through the disinterested eyes of faith that seek an experience of faith and not to protect the Book.

The Bible is not particularly unique in that it wrestles with the mystery of suffering. Most religious systems come to grips with this question and their sacred writings reflect their struggles. The Old Testament is an anthology of texts composed over a thousand and more years with reflections on suffering that represent the attitudes of various authors in quite different situations. The New Testament presupposes many of the insights of the Old Testament and builds upon them. The New Testament deepens and develops Israel's understandings, as experienced by Jesus and his followers. Therefore, one must note their close inter-relatedness to appreciate both Testaments to the full.

The Israelite religion drew on alien sources from time to time. Often foreign ideas and rituals were adopted and incorporated into the cultic life. Amazingly, it constructed out of these adaptations something distinctively its own. The Israelites believed that God made himself known through past events. It was not difficult for them to believe that He would act in the future.

The distinctive genius of Israel lay in its realization and acceptance of the possibility that God might disclose himself in the events of history. . . . In point of fact, God was believed to make himself known in a great variety of ways - in creation or in the natural order, in the lives of exemplary men, in the words and actions of inspired individuals, in carefully ordered rituals, or even in the chance occurrences and accidents of life.³

Ostensibly this brief summary of the place of history in Israelite religion has little direct significance to the problem of suffering. The key to the Old Testament understanding is bound in this historical understanding that God has and would show his hand in history. Yet at the very same time it also creates the problem of suffering, "because the more firmly it is believed that God has participated in historical events the more inevitably it is bound to be asked why he does not participate more often."⁴ Questions arise such as why do the innocent suffer and why doesn't God always intervene to save the faithful believers. Part of the Old Testament's raison d'être, in some small way, is connected with the working out of these types of questions.

Jesus had a unique interpretation of what Judaism ought to have been which made his teaching original and distinctive. His understanding of life and faith was built upon a direct relationship with God. While that was always

³John Bowker, Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 5.

⁴Ibid., p. 7.

a possibility in Israelite theology, it was rarely embodied as explicitly as it was in the words and deeds of Jesus.

It possessed an independence built on a degree and quality of direct relationship with God which is always an implicit possibility in Judaism, but which has rarely, if ever, been so explicitly asserted as it was in the life and teaching of Jesus. The security of that relationship enabled him to move with an extraordinary degree of detachment among the varied patterns of Jewish life while remaining completely involved in them.⁵

Many Jews marked out Jesus' interpretation of the faith as a misinterpretation because it was too detached and independent. Furthermore, his style called into question the collective wisdom of the community. It is not difficult to see why the Gospel writers sought to establish his authority on the basis of this direct relationship with God (Matt. 21:23f; Mark 11:27f; Luke 20:1f).

Hence, the words and deeds of Jesus belong to Judaism, yet at the same time they initiated something new. This existential certainty of God influenced his whole understanding of life and death, especially his own.

The Christian understanding of suffering is predominantly isolated in the crucifixion of Jesus. The biblical record points to the fact that this direct relationship led Jesus to the cross. This involvement was vindicated by his resurrection. Both the life oriented toward the cross and the resurrection were matters of plain knowledge. "What

⁵Ibid., pp. 44-45.

gave rise to that conviction has frequently been made a matter of dispute, but what cannot be disputed is the strength of the conviction and the startlingly abrupt nature of its origin and impact."⁶

The Gospels are not just the story of the life and teaching of Jesus but they are the interpretations of why those particular words and deeds are of continuing and vital importance. These writings lead the reader directly toward the cross which epitomizes early and innocent human suffering culminating in a violent death. What appears to be a tragic ending is seen through the eyes of faith as a new beginning. Defeat was transformed by the power of God into a victory.

Thus, in connection with suffering, the Gospels are controlled by a knowledge that Jesus met the realities of suffering in his own person and was not defeated by them. This is applied in the Gospels in two important ways: first, it is made entirely clear that Jesus knew where his life was leading, and that it would issue in his own suffering; and secondly, the conquest of suffering which took place in his own person in the crucifixion and resurrection also took place throughout his life in the way in which he met, actively and positively, the facts of suffering as he found them. Those "two elements have remained characteristic of

⁶Ibid., p. 46.

the Christian response of suffering."⁷

Jesus faced the possibility of physical pain and mental anguish with a desire that it might be otherwise, yet at the same time he maintained an unbroken confidence in God. Through the healing accounts we can see that he was actively engaged with the forces which caused human suffering, whether it was the devil, unclean spirits, or the over-scrupulous religious leaders. Jesus never commented on or discussed the question why should suffering exist. We may presume that he accepted in part the orthodox view that suffering was caused by sin. There are two passages which reflect his opposition to that understanding--John 9:1f and John 13:1f.

It is misleading to separate the Gospels from the other New Testament writings. Both groups of records represent attempts to understand, interpret, and transmit the story of the risen Christ. A significant part of the Gospels is made up of narratives of Jesus' life while the other writings make very little mention of the details of his life. Both groups seek the same general purpose which is to identify and explain why the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are of continuing importance.

In connection with human pain and anguish, the New Testament employs both theory and practice which are set in

⁷Ibid., pp. 46, 47.

the context of a clear and final victory assured for all believers. The resurrection was a guarantee that nothing could remove or destroy that triumphant participation of the Christian with his God. Theory rested in how Christians interpreted this event as the decisive event. Was his death a payment to a despotic Lord, or a pleasant sacrifice or a ransom to an offended God? It raised the question of what was the nature and origin of evil and how the resurrection dispelled it. The practical aspect was seen in how the people actually reacted to usual and unusual experiences of suffering.

To complete our general background work, we shall examine the distinct biblical definitions of evil and suffering. Evil in the Old Testament is defined as that which is not valuable with reference to an end. It applies to something or someone that is not fit to promote an end as well as a thing not being truly what it pretends to be.⁸ The XLL usually renders evil by the words κακός and πονηρός.

κακός emphasizes the unfitness or worthlessness of an object. It devaluates an object in light of its own intrinsic standard. πονηρός is evil in the sense of being perilous, harmful, or dangerous. It characterizes an object in accordance to the negative significance which it has for

⁸O. A. Piper, "Suffering and Evil", in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, (1962), IV, 450-3.

something or somebody. *κακός* and *κακία* designate the evils which God places on man, whereas *πονηρός* is used regarding the evils which created beings cause to or on one another.

The New Testament shows a preference for *πονηρός* in the broad sense of not valuable in achieving a goal or evil. *θλιψις* is also used in the LXX which means something that hurts, limits, oppresses people and makes them feel unhappy. It designates the evil condition in which people are, rather than the quality or action of persons.

The modern differentiation between natural and moral evil is alien to the Bible, the reason being that these key words measure both persons and objects with reference to God's ultimate purpose. There was no way to distinguish the two since in their minds the two were only one. Natural evils resulted from the divine curse (Gen. 3:14-19) but to the Jews they were evil primarily because their presence was a sign that man had broken his relationship with God.

The severe character of nature, disease, want, distress, calamity, toil, hardship, hopeless situations, weakness, corruptibility, futility, insults, defamations, enmity, injustice, oppression, persecution and sins are a few of the evils frequently mentioned in the scriptures. Added to these are the states of mind and body created by these evils - hunger, thirst, sorrow, fear, anxiety, despair.

Evils create the impression that God is not able to cope with them. Instead of blocking man's desire for happiness, evil is understood as making faith difficult or nonsensical. People are unable to discern the saving will of God because of evil and suffering.

In a general sense, the Bible claims that nothing is evil itself since God created it good. Man did not cause evil. The origin is outside of himself. But man has to bear the moral responsibility for his wrong choices. It is through these wrong choices that the harmony of this world was disturbed. God allowed or provided the opportunity for evil. Man chooses to bring it from potentiality to actuality. In the Bible, sin is the root of all evils. Consequently, the majority of biblical thought is not preoccupied with escaping suffering, but rather with avoiding sin. Suffering is caused by evil, and evil is brought about by sin.

PERSPECTIVES

Let us turn now from these introductory remarks to a lexical study of suffering in the Bible. In this section, I set forth a detailed examination of a number of passages that deal with suffering in order to discern its multiple interpretations. This is a thorough but not exhaustive examination. I have considered passages suggested by other authors as well as many that I discovered through my own reading of the Bible. Some passages will properly fit into

two or more perspectives because of the synthesis that has occurred in the biblical writer's mind. The order of the study is topical in terms of the nine perspectives previously mentioned. There will be no attempt to deal with the prophets, pentateuch, historical books, or any other specific portion of the Bible. Questions of date and authorship, though important, will not be dealt with. To the best of my knowledge, no one has attempted to trace these perspectives through both Testaments in this detailed fashion.

Retributive

The most frequently mentioned perspective regarding suffering is that it is retributive. A nation or individual suffers pain because it/he has sinned. Suffering is punishment for wrongdoing in an almost cause and effect fashion. This view "attributes all suffering in this life to God's judgment on man's sin."⁹ People will be rewarded for righteousness and punished for wickedness. That simple cause and effect explanation is written very deeply in Scripture. It is implicit in the covenant relationship through which the Israelites understood how they were related to God. "A covenant relationship is one of promise and threat, depending on the extent to which the conditions have been observed or broken."¹⁰ Israel suffered drought,

⁹Clinard, p. 18.

¹⁰Bowker, p. 13.

famine, and conquest without God. They experienced peace and prosperity when united with God in obedience.

In the New Testament Jesus is quoted as giving contradictory sayings regarding this retributive principle. In Matthew 7:24-27, he seems to be affirming the reward and punishment scheme. But in John 9:1ff and Luke 13:1ff, he apparently refuses to continue that orthodox kind of thinking. And in Luke 16:19ff he rejects the idea that wealth and prosperity are signs of righteousness. In Matthew 5:43-45, he denies the idea that all suffering is due to retribution for sin. He declares that all men, good and bad, benefit from the goodness of God.

Also, within this retributive perspective was the concept of collective responsibility. A particular person continued to enjoy the blessings merited by his father and likewise the opposite was true. Solomon's escape from rejection for the sake of David, and "we have sinned with our fathers" are such examples (Jer. 31:29; Ez. 18:14ff).

Genesis 2:4b-3:24. This section of Scripture includes two stories. The first related man's development in relationship to God in paradise and the second his breaking the prior relationship and its consequences. Our study is interested in verses 3:14-19 which present the resultant punishment given to the participants.

By way of introductory comment, paradise is a garden on the earth and is not an ethereal place. Man is created

to work in the garden and preserve it from destruction, which is quite different from our present-day notions of paradise.

Note that God's prohibition was not oppressive since man could benefit from all the other trees. "It placed before man decision and the serious question of obedience Nothing is said to indicate that God combined pedagogical intentions with this prohibition (in the sense of a moral development of man)."¹¹ In this situation, man was completely subject to God and his command. God's command not to eat the fruit was well intentioned. The forbidden food was bad for man and, eaten by him in disobedience, it would work negatively upon him. The issue is not in pleasure and freedom from suffering, but solely in the question of obedience.

The mention of the snake is incidental. The author did not want to shift the responsibility from man. He wanted to prevent the objectifying of evil and therefore has cast it in as an inconspicuous a role as possible. Evil was not coming in from the outside. Here, there is obviously no etology of the origin of evil.

The snake asserts that he knows God better than the woman, even in her believing obedience. This assertion

¹¹Gerhard von Rad, Genesis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 80.

causes the woman to leave the boundaries of obedience. From this new position outside of obedience she attempts to judge God and his orders as though she were a neutral observer. A new mode of human existence is proposed indirectly by the snake's assertion. Life in this new mode has increased intelligence and firsthand knowledge of the mysteries that lie presently beyond man's capacity. This knowledge implies power over the mysteries.

Even at this point, there is no summons given by the snake. Decision and guilt rest completely on the person. Immediately the action becomes sin through an encounter with God. Fear becomes a sign of disorder in the divine-human relationship and shame a sign of disturbance in the human-human relationship.

When questioned, man seeks to place the burden of guilt not on the woman but on God who gave her. With his new intelligence he seeks the ultimate cause. The woman is not able to bear the responsibility either since she points to the snake. Oddly, the snake is not questioned.

It's important that our narrative absolves God's creation of any pain or suffering. "Here a primeval offense receives its consequences which faith recognizes as a punishment inflicted by God. These sorrows, contradictions, and degradation come from the person's selfish decision."¹² The curse of the soil and the misery of agri-

¹²Ibid., p. 93.

cultural life are so overwhelming because work, which was ordained for man, now includes failures, waste of time, and irregular results for consistent hard labor. The woman's life is affected by three related and unresolved tensions: "1) hardships of pregnancy, pains at birth and 2) yet a profound desire for the man in whom she 3) still does not find fulfillment and rest, but rather humiliating domination."¹³

Their autonomous knowing and willing are the guiding principles of the man's and woman's life. The guiding principle is not obedience as it once was. Thus, they have ceased to understand themselves as creatures.

The synthesizing of two traditions accounts for the tension between the threat of death (2:17) and the word of punishment (3:19). Our attention has focused on the Yahwistic story of paradise and the fall. The author has seen shame, fear, pain, and frustration in his present world situation, and he seeks to ascribe them to human sin. Furthermore, and more centrally, he is concerned to acquit God and his creation of all suffering. "The manifold profound troubles in human life have their root in the one trouble of man's relationship to God. Expressed more concisely, Genesis 3 asserts that all sorrow comes from sin."¹⁴

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 101.

Exodus 3-12. Implied in these chapters are pains that were meant to change Pharaoh's mind. Therefore, they would not fit in our second perspective. But the final act of God, the slaying of the first born (11:4ff) seems to be a punishment; thus it properly fits here.

Exodus 20:1-26. The relationship of suffering and sin is clearly stated in 20:4-6 and inferred in 20:18-20. Disobedience will be punished and even felt by the grandchildren of those who disobeyed. Exodus 23:20f speaks of a blessing that will come if the people are attentive to God's messenger. Suffering is implied in the prohibition of rebellion against the angel.

Leviticus 26:3-46. This law book closes with the announcement of reward for obedience (3-13) and punishment for disobedience (14-35). These are materialistically conceived. It was an ancient Eastern custom that contracts were sealed with blessings and curses. These benevolent and malevolent sentences show that their effects will be passed on to future generations which is an element of the retributive perspective. Natural disaster will overtake them in direct consequence of their choice.

Numbers 12:1-16. This is the account of Miriam and Aaron's jealousy regarding Moses' leadership. It is interesting to note that the Lord punishes them both for their

foolishness and sin by inflicting Miriam with leprosy. Aaron is Miriam's brother and is directly affected by her condition. Even though the outcome of this action is repentance (which would place it in perspective two), it is not stated beforehand. All that is mentioned is God's anger.

Numbers 14:18. Here is another statement of the enduring effects of sin. God will forgive the sin, but he cannot absolve the guilty of the inevitable consequences and results of their sin. Nor will he prevent those consequences from taking place in the third and fourth generations.

Numbers 14:26-45. The Israelites suffer because of their faithlessness (33). They shall wander for forty years and the children will be afflicted for their father's disloyalty. Note that the defeat (39-45) is caused because God's blessing is withheld (42).

Deuteronomy 4:25-40. The major thrust of this passage (29-40) is that the door of salvation is still open for Israel.¹⁵ In 25-28 the precise penalty for idolatry is made explicit. It is a three-fold punishment: 1) national death; 2) separation from the land; and 3) a scattering of the survivors among foreign nations. Even though the

¹⁵Gerhard von Rad, Deuteronomy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 50, 51.

retributive principle is operative, God is pictured as merciful. Verses 29-31 place this passage in perspective two as well.

Deuteronomy 5:7-10. Another prohibition against idolatry reflects the same long-range effects of sin. The children are inextricably involved in the sins of their parents and their community. Included is the balancing desire of Yahweh that he wishes to save more than to punish and to destroy.

Deuteronomy 11:13-17. Here is an exhortation to obey God and be blessed by good natural consequences, i.e., rain. The warning or threat of v. 16f places the people in a position of choice similar to that in Genesis. Von Rad views this in light of the writer's rationalizing ability which would interpret suffering (i.e., lack of rain) as a discipline. "It is characteristic of the rationalizing trend in Deuteronomy that Israel is 'disciplined' by the divine working in history, that the story of God's action is regarded principally from its educational aspect."¹⁶

Deuteronomy 24:16. At first sight this passage appears to be a revolutionary change in the idea of collective responsibility. A natural assumption would be that it is a redactor's addition. However, Von Rad believes that

¹⁶Ibid., p. 85.

there is no reason to think that the principle of individual responsibility was not used before and with collective liability (Joshua 7:24f, II Sam. 3:29; 21:1ff; II Kings 14:6). "The principle of personal responsibility was by no means unknown in the earlier times. The whole Book of the Covenant knows nothing of such corporate liability within the family. Therefore, we must reckon with the possibility that our Deuteronomic regulation is after all much earlier than was formerly assumed."¹⁷ At any rate, the idea of retribution is clearly present.

Deuteronomy 27:1-26. Accepting the covenant relationship with Yahweh (26:17-19, 27:9 & 10), the nation in two congregations recites in antiphonal style the prohibitions that follow a contract. There are no blessings mentioned in this worship form. The word for curse denotes a curse from God in retribution. A curse had destructive power which could establish itself in a person's house and timbers (Zech. 5:4). The Amen at the end of each prohibition is an affirmation given by the people that they will not only abide by the curse but that they will become a part of God's tool in carrying out its negative effects. The community would not support or associate itself with evildoers. Note that the laws refer to sins that could be done in secret. A murder, a removal of a land boundary,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 152.

the deception of a blind man, an image set up in the house, and sexual matters - all of these could be done out of the public view.

Deuteronomy 28:1-68. As a continued part of the covenant contract more blessings (1-14) and curses (15-68) are listed. The disproportionate length of the curses may be seen in the gradual additions and expansions that were made in light of the exile in 587 B.C. These blessings and curses regard the security and material abundance in the land as dependent upon the people's choice to obey or not to obey. "The desire of this people to live as a nation in pre-eminence, security and plenty will be fulfilled if God is obeyed . . . To disobey the divine Lord is to betray life itself as Israel understood it."¹⁸ The choice is between life (blessing) and death (curse).

Joshua 7:1-26. The theft by Achan contrary to law was sufficient sin to cause Israel to be defeated at Ai. Joshua tried to blame God. God referred the matter to the sin of the people, i.e., Achan. The single sin brought retribution on all of Israel and on Achan as an individual. Verse 19 is termed by Von Rad as a doxology of judgment.¹⁹

¹⁸G. Ernest Wright, "Deuteronomy: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953), II, 493.

¹⁹Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), I, 357f.

It is an act of praise and confession which precedes punishment. This doxology of Achan's brings the matter to a formal end accompanied with the stoning and burning.

2 Samuel 12:1-31. The key verses are 13 and 14. King David sinned and was punished by the loss of his son. It appears that redactors may have added further punishment in light of the later Davidic history. His sin represented a three-fold rebellion against God and his sovereignty: 1) as a child of God, he was disobedient; 2) as an especially chosen and dedicated representative of God, he dishonored the King; and 3) as a ruthless disrupter of fine human relationships, he sinned against other children of God, and so against the whole covenant purpose of God.²⁰

I Kings 11:1-13. In chapter 10, Solomon is seen as a model king, excellent in every way. In this chapter, Solomon chooses to disobey God's commandment prohibiting marriage with foreign women. In addition, he establishes the worship of other gods. A father's righteousness is passed on and another father's sin is also felt in the next generation. Because of David, Solomon will not be punished. Because of Solomon, his son shall receive the divine retribution. The son will have the support of only one tribe. The effects of his father's sin are passed on to him.

²⁰George B. Caird, "II Samuel: Exposition", Interpreter's Bible (1953), II, 1105.

II Kings 5:19b-27. This is the account of Gehazi's sinful greed and his consequent punishment. Having been healed from leprosy, Naaman offers a gift of gratitude to the prophet Elisha. Elisha refuses, but his servant Gehazi becomes aware of Naaman's desire and capacity to give. Gehazi follows Naaman out of town. He approaches him with the news that Elisha has changed his mind. Naaman willingly gives Gehazi the gifts and more. When Gehazi returns, he discovers that the prophet is aware of his sin. Elisha announces the punishment. He will have the leprosy that was on Naaman. It will cling to him and his family forever.

II Kings 21:1-26. The sins of Menasseh are many. He built altars to foreign gods, he sacrificed his son, practiced soothsaying, augury, and relied on mediums and wizards. Because of the many acts of disobedience, God punished Judah (v. 10f).

II Kings 22:1-23:30. Following the sinful rule of Manasseh and Amon, Josiah was chosen king. Many acts of reform were initiated by Josiah after he became aware of God's will through the law book (22:3-20). A covenant was established between God and the people via the king (23:1-3). Note that there were no blessings and curses mentioned. King Josiah displayed great leadership and obedience to God. There were no sins listed against him. Yet the king was killed and the reform destroyed because the multitude of

Manesseh's sins were passed on to this generation. Josiah should have lived a long and prosperous life. The writer could not explain his death in any other terms except that the effects of the sins were passed on.

Job 4:7-9. Eliphaz is the speaker. He recites the orthodox view of retribution. The innocent and righteous are blessed and the wicked are punished.

Job 6:24. Job is responding to Eliphaz's insinuation that he must have merited his affliction. Job does not deny the possibility that he may have committed some minor or unconscious errors. But he would like to know what he has done to deserve such terrible tribulation. The punishment does not reflect fairly the sin. This idea is also implicit in 10:2.

Job 8:3-4. A blunt rhetorical confrontation by Bildad pointedly shows that retribution was meted out to the children because they sinned.

Job 11:1-6. A heated blast from Zophar again reflects the retribution element to a man who sins by claiming to be righteous in the sight of God, for no one is righteous before God. Secret sins known only by God are what Zophar is referring to in verses 5 and 6. Far from

punishing Job unjustly, God gives him less than he deserves."²¹

The book of Job is complex and difficult to interpret. Within it are two different stories: Job 1 and 2 plus 42:7-17 and 2:11-42:6. The oldest of these two is the former. It speaks of punishment for sin and reward for faithfulness. The older story shows no sign of the despair and crisis that is basic to the second story. There seems to be no theological interpretation of this experience of suffering. The author's conclusion via Job is that there is nothing in this affliction which causes him to doubt or be disloyal to God.

The second story paints a totally different picture. Job is not secure in his commitment to God. His faith is badly shaken by the tribulation that he has encountered. Because he is crying out, it is safe to assume that he feels abandoned by God.

The difficulties of this story begin with the fact that there is no clear progression of thought in the dialogues.²² The problem of interpretation is clouded further by the discovery of its highly composite character. There are different but slightly connected points to ponder. The redactor's thread is showing in part. Furthermore, the

²¹M. H. Pope, Job (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p.85.

²²Rad Old Testament Theology, I, 409.

ultimate existential despair displayed by Job is quite foreign to Israelite writing. Israel connected suffering with sin in a cause and effect relationship. "It was her deep conviction that every evil act set in progress a bane which sooner or later had to rebound upon the agent."²³

While Job was agonizingly questioning this hidden God, he by no means totally rejected the retributive principle. He was disturbed by the fact that this affliction brought a testimony against himself (16:8). Job had fortitude and perseverance based on his righteousness. He neither hid nor ran away, but sought an answer (27:5, 6). In essence, this story speaks of a man seeking justification before God more than it does of theodicy or a new interpretation of suffering.

Of central importance is the fact that Job faces a breakdown of traditional orthodox theology. The old religious ideas are contradicted by his personal experience. The faith has nothing to say about his acute situation. It is only faith by itself that is Job's hope.

Above all, we have to see clearly that of himself Job has nothing to put in the place of the old point of view. The peculiarity of his situation is precisely that with the breakdown of the old religious ideas, Job saw himself confronted by a theological abyss in which everything that faith was able to say about God was lost; and over which remained only Yahweh in his boundless power and holiness.²⁴

Another author continues the thought by saying "the

²³Ibid., I, 412.

²⁴Ibid.

complete evasion of the issue as Job had posed it must be the poet's oblique way of admitting that there is no satisfactory answer available to man, apart from faith . . ."²⁵

Therefore, the answer that the second story of Job provides is found in the mysterious workings of God which are beyond the comprehension of finite man. But more than the emphasis on the mystery is the author's belief that God cares and is actively involved in the management of his world. The power to create and sustain life as manifested in the unusual animals points to both facts - mystery and amazing care. Job has spoken too hastily and out of ignorance. "Yahweh makes no charge against Job except that he had spoken out of ignorance. Nothing is said that would imply that Job deserved his misery."²⁶ Job is vindicated by the fact that no charge of guilt is brought up before him by God. At least, the second story refutes the orthodox notion that all suffering is a proof of committed sin. The transition from discouragement, fear, doubt, and despair to respect, honor, trust, and love is one that every person makes on the way to faith.

Psalms 1:1-6. The major thrust of this psalm is captured in two themes: life with and life apart from God. Explicitly it reaffirms God's protective providential care

²⁵Pope, p. 1 xxx.

²⁶Ibid.

for the righteous who are obedient. Implicitly, it focuses on the terrible life of the wicked who do not respond to God. God will deal justly with those who decide to break his law.

Psalms 7:3-5. In spite of possible textual difficulties, the author claims his innocence of any wrong-doing by taking an oath of purgation and seeking refuge in God. If this poet was guilty, he probably would have taken his deserved punishment in a stoic manner. Job also took this kind of oath to declare his innocence (Job 31:1ff). "He has not inflicted any evil upon his adversary for which the pursuer could now hold him responsible. If it were otherwise, then he would have no right to complain about the fact that he is persecuted and that his life and his honor are threatened by his adversary."²⁷

Psalms 15:1-5. The theme of retribution lies implicit in this hymn. It states that the godly or righteous, those who follow the law regarding social solidarity, will dwell secure in the land. The idea being that material blessings will be theirs for obedience.

Psalms 18:1-30. The poet's righteousness is accounted specifically in v. 20-24. It is similar to the

²⁷Arthur Weiser, The Psalms (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 136.

protestation of innocence that Job and others have used. This is not correctly understood as a personal boast as we might think, but it is his way of declaring that God's grace can be trusted and depended upon. "It is therefore not a question of a protestation of innocence which, prompted by pharisaic self-righteousness, gives an account to God of the king's own deserts, but of an affirmation of faith in the covenant faithfulness of God, which may be experienced by those who in obedience to God's ordinances keep their faith in him."²⁸

Psalms 28:3-5. The first portion of the poet's supplication deals with his desire not to be grouped with those who are disobedient to the Lord. The reason is found in v. 5, because he does not want to be broken down and not built up. This second portion deals with the well-deserved retribution of the wicked for they do not regard the deeds of God.

Psalms 37:1-40. While this psalm does not deal with the theodicy problem or the doctrine of retribution in a direct manner, it does give pastoral advice regarding the strength found in the power of faith. It may appear at first to be naive optimism. But a closer examination reveals the assuredness and peace of a faith born and tested

²⁸Ibid., p. 192.

by many struggles. It affirms in a subdued fashion the retributive principle in that the wicked will not last and the faithful and obedient believers will be preserved.

Psalms 49:1-20. The sense of retribution is presented even if it takes an unusual eschatological turn (v. 13-15). This passage fits more appropriately in perspective nine, although it does reflect the idea of punishment.

Psalms 52:1-9. The wicked who disrupt community life and social solidarity are going to be punished. The poet here has the retribution principle in mind but adds the future to it as a real hope of his. Presently God has not acted. But someday soon he will, and the poet as one of the righteous will laugh at those he punishes. Without this hope in God, this man and others might fall prey to the power of evil.

Psalms 73:1-28. This hymn fits into two categories. These verses speak of the despair that the poet had just before he received his revelation. His despair and revelation dealt with the actions of evildoers. Because of their success, he almost lost his faith in God. But in worship he discovered their real fate and realized that God was still in control. The central issue is not suffering, but man's faith relationship with God. "This is a matter of

life and death: the question of the survival of faith. The problem of suffering is really only the occasion and point of departure for religion's comprehensive inquiry into the nature and value of man's communion with God by faith in view of the mysterious reality of human life."²⁹

Psalms 90:7-8. The poet is apparently in the midst of great tribulation. He has interpreted his suffering as come from God because of some secret sins that have occurred.

Psalms 91:1-16. There are two perspectives or speakers in this hymn - the poet's (1-13) and God's view (14-16). Illustrations abound of the blessing and strength that comes forth from establishing one's trust in God. In every danger there is a promise that God will keep those who are obedient safe. The silent contrast is overwhelming. An unsheltered and unprotected life is the lot of the non-believer.

Psalms 92:1-15. The poet shares the same frustration as those in Psalms 37, 49, 73. He looks at the success of the wicked and wonders why God has not acted. His vision of faith sees beyond the immediate pains and injustices to the time that God will vindicate himself. In fact, he sees that the wicked are present and active so that God can manifest his glory and power. The poet's personal suf-

²⁹Ibid., p. 587.

fering is not clearly presented. But we may presume that at least the injustices made him suffer mentally or he would not have given further thought to the situation. The psalmist is not gloating over his enemy's fate. "This is an expression not of gloating over his adversary's well-deserved fate, but of joy in the manifestation of God's power which signifies judgment for his enemies, but salvation for the godly."³⁰ The retribution is carried on in the contrast of the growing palm tree and fading grass. The wicked will suffer and die because they have disobeyed God. Suffering is the punishment for sin.

Psalms 106:1-48. The theme of this hymn is the abundant grace of God as contrasted with the sin and wickedness of his people. Because the people rebelled, they were punished. This song of salvation history more accurately fits perspective two, because God seeks to reform and change his people. However, in verse 23, God is thought to have moved from his disciplinary to his retributive activity. Destruction was a punishment without hope for change. The total impact of the psalm is disciplinary as seen in the concluding verses 40-46.

Psalms 107:10-32. This hymn may well have been used in worship to account the saving acts of God. While

³⁰Ibid., p. 616.

retribution is not the central theme, it is verified in verses 10, 11, 17, 34.

Psalms 147:6. Behind these two terms, downtrodden and wicked, lies the expectation of divine judgment in which God will execute his righteousness. This means help and salvation for his faithful people and doom for the wicked. The wicked suffer for their misdeeds.

Proverbs 10:27-30. In these few verses, the retribution principle is affirmed. But as we have seen it developing at different points, the punishment will occur in the future. This emphasis on the future reflects two items. One, the righteous are not benefiting presently, in a visible fashion, from their faith. It does not necessarily mean that they are suffering. But they are aware that the evildoers are not being punished immediately following their misdeeds. Second, their faith in God is not shaken by this postponement of penalty. The righteous have hope and faith that God will act at the appropriate time. His justice will be manifested.

In Proverbs there are many antithetical wisdom sayings regarding the blessing of the obedient and the cursing of the disobedient. These have been connected by the redactor and there does not seem to be any desired progression intended. Rather, these appear to be pieces of practical advice on how to live within the community. Retribution is

seen through a number of these as being carried out via the social structure. The underlined verses speak more strongly to our present topic while the rest imply the principle:

12: 2, 3, 5-7, 13, 19, 21, 22, 26, 28; 13: 4, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14, 18, 20-21; 14:11; 15: 6, 29; 16:5; 17:5, 13; 19:23; 21:12; 22:4, 22-23; 24:15, 16, 19-20; 28:14, 20.

Isaiah 3:10, 11. The author contrasts the righteous and the wicked and their respective rewards and punishments. Their future is dependent upon the decision to obey which is manifested in their deeds. In this case, nature will take its course and they will reap what they sow. In v. 17, 24, 25, the Lord passes judgment on the wicked. Each item of the punishment described drives home the point that it will properly fit the sin.

Isaiah 40:2. Israel has been punished for her sins. God now forgives and pardons her. This passage fits the disciplinary and sacrificial categories. But the punishment was just that, until the prophet announced a different way to interpret the suffering. "But his words in 2c made them once more aware that what is now over and done with was the consequences of Israel's iniquities."³¹

Jeremiah 7:1-20. The prophet announces the conditions for repentance in light of social justice. The

³¹Claus Westermann, Isaiah 40-66 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 36.

people's evil ways must be changed. But they are not and God's anger is poured out on the disobedient in painful ways.

Jeremiah 12:17. If the people do not change their ways and seek the Lord, he will utterly destroy them. At this point, there is no mention of a remnant for whom this might possibly be disciplinary.

Jeremiah 17:5-8. A contrast of those who trust in themselves (and shall fade away) and those who trust in God (and shall be materially sustained in life). Suffering will be upon those who don't turn to the Lord (v. 6).

Jeremiah 31:29. This is the well-known passage of transition from corporate to individual responsibility. "Each one shall die for his own sin." - Enough said.

Ezekiel 5:1-17. The terrible words of judgment are captured in this passage. Because the people have sinned through their disobedience, God will destroy them. Even the remnant will be scattered and pursued.

Ezekiel 8:5-9:11. This declaration reveals four different kinds of idolatry. The key for the retributive principle is found in v. 18. However, it moves from punishment to discipline in 9:3-4 because God sets a limit to his chastisement. The nation's guilt is transformed into

an issue of individual innocence.

Ezekiel 17:1-24. Here is the parable of the cedar and two eagles. It shows the punishment that was brought down because of the broken covenant (15, 18-21, 24).

Ezekiel 18:1-32. This is similar to Jeremiah 31:29, 30. It is the transfer from corporate or chain reaction sin/guilt to individual sin/guilt. There is a list of demands for the righteous in v. 5-9. They are not to be sinless or conform perfectly to God's will but rather must be a willing member of the community. The wicked person is the one who insists on living his own life (v. 13). Those who sin shall bear the guilt. The guilt manifests itself in painful ways.

Ezekiel 22:23-31. This is a general description of the corruption prevailing among the whole people. The wicked and disobedient are punished by God's wrath.

Ezekiel 23:1-35. For not obeying God, Oholah and Oholibah, allegorically Samaria and Jerusalem, are slain.

Hosea 4:1-10. A general description of all of the wickedness is set forth with its natural consequences. There is a strong connection between the productivity of the land and social solidarity. Verse 9 identifies the action of retribution in that the people shall suffer be-

cause the Lord will retaliate against them for their own sins and the sins of the priests.

Hosea 7:8-16. Ephraim will be destroyed because of its misplaced trust in foreign powers as well as general unfaithfulness to the Lord. The same is true for 9:15-17.

Amos 1:3-2:11. As if he were staging a verbal mortar attack, the prophet applies the principle of retribution to all of the countries surrounding Israel and Judah. In dramatic contrast, he then associates these two beloved countries with those wicked foreigners. They shall be punished too because of their unjust and unethical behavior.

Amos 3:3-8. Evil comes only because it fulfills a purpose that God has laid down (v.6) - retribution.

Matthew 24:36-39. Implicit in this text is the thought that those who do evil will be like those who did in Noah's time. They will be justly punished. Parallel Luke 17:22-37.

Luke 1:20. Zechariah the priest was made speechless because he did not believe and obey the Lord's messenger. The passage may fit more appropriately in the disciplinary and educational category, even though his learning a lesson is not explicit.

John 3:36. The theme of retribution is passed on

in the person who does not believe and obey. Punishment is both present and future.

Acts 5:1-11. Here is the story of Ananias and Sapphira who both withheld some money gained from the sale of their own property (assumed to be their property from 4:34). Both man and woman were struck down dead for lying to God. It is implied that their death was retribution rather than shock or accident.

Acts 13:8-12. Deceitful and wicked Elymas was blinded because he prevented the proconsul from receiving the faith. It appears to be both a punishment and a discipline, because of the phrase "for a time" (v. 11). But discipline is generally applied only to those within a family or community. Discipline to those outside of the faith is punishment. At any rate, the magician suffered for his wickedness.

Acts 28:1-6. The Judeo-Christians were not the only ones who were familiar with this principle. It is known by the natives of Malta in that they believe Paul did some evil or else he would not have been bitten by the snake.

Romans 1:18-32. The just and natural consequences, whatever they were, were received in "their own person" for the peoples' wickedness. Added to this was the fact that

these sinners were rejected by God.

Romans 2:6-11. Paul reminds his listeners of the blessing and curse that will be theirs depending upon their choice. Retribution is clearly stated in v. 9.

II Corinthians 5:10. Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church. His message contains eschatological retribution. Those who are good on earth will be blessed according to their deeds as will the evildoers in opposite fashion.

Conclusion. Through this study, we have noted that people interpreted their suffering as punishment from God which they deserved. Their deserving status was brought about by sin, either their own or their ancestors. Sin predominately expressed itself in the breaking of God's commandment regarding social solidarity. But it was by no means limited to just that area. The covenant relationship established an expectation that there would be physical security and blessing if the people were faithful to that agreement. When they suffered it was a sure sign that there was a disturbance in that divine-human relationship. We also noted a shift in the perspective regarding the immediate punishment of the wicked. While in some texts it was quick and very visible, in others punishment was sure but long in coming.

Out of these struggles emerged many questions. Why does God's justice take so long? Why is it not more visible to give strength and encouragement to the faithful? Why did it seem that the righteous suffered while the wicked succeeded? Our next perspective was formulated to deal with a few of these questions.

Disciplinary or Educational

Religion has been confronted by suffering as probably the most perplexing problem. The difficulties of explaining how a benevolent deity can allow hardship and pain are mind-boggling even to the most committed believer. As we have seen, the prophets and others preached that sin brought calamitous suffering and that retribution was sure to follow wrongdoing. For whatever reason, the message of retribution was adapted or modified so that punishment from God was seen to have a purpose. The basic purpose was to teach repentance. The people came to believe that God's goodness and love were manifested even in his anger. The preachers knew why God permitted pain and anguish. It was due to the people's sin. "God disciplines his people that they may be brought closer to him. The purpose is often educational - to train and to mature through pain."³² The illustration most frequently given uses the comparison of

³²Clinard, p. 20.

our heavenly and earthly fathers. If God loves his children, he must discipline them like a father.

Accidents which involve pain may serve as a warning or as a protection. They may prevent a person from slipping into wrongdoing, particularly the peril of complacency and pride.³³ The idea of a warning is also captured in the remarks of Jesus in Luke 13, regarding the accidental death of eighteen people. They were no worse sinners than anybody else. But to those who were listening he said "unless you repent you will all likewise perish." An accident may be a call to return to God.

Disciplinary suffering may serve to remind us of our finite limits. God is the giver and sustainer of life. His providential care keeps us aware that he is God and we are his people through obedience.

Moreover there is the thought that suffering is needed as a disciplinary measure, to keep us reminded that we receive our life from God and do not grab it by our own power, to teach us that our welfare and fulfillment can be had only through offering ourselves in obedience to God and depending on his mercy.³⁴

Wayne Oates agrees when he says that the biblical witness insists that one of the main purposes of human suffering is instruction in obedience - obedience to the fact that we are persons and not God - obedience to our

³³Robert Gordis, "The Lord out of the Whirlwind," Judaism, XIII (Winter 1964), 48.

³⁴Hugh S. Tigner, "The Perspective of Victory," Interpretation, XII (October 1958), 402.

human limitations.³⁵

To be clear, discipline refers to training that develops self-control or character. It is the acceptance of and submission to a certain authority. In our case, the authority is God. Not all discipline involves suffering. But suffering may result from treatment that seeks to correct or change a person. In contrast, retribution was strictly punishment (pain, loss, or suffering) for a sin or wrongdoing. There was no correction intended, though in some incidents it may consequently have happened. Chastisement is a way of speaking more specifically about bodily or personal punishment. It often connotes both discipline and retribution. The infliction of tribulation with the purpose of making someone obedient is referred to as chastening.³⁶ We will turn now to an examination of the biblical witness.

Genesis 42-45. The brothers of Joseph are tested and in a manner of speaking are disciplined for their previous harsh treatment of their brother. Clearly the main thrust of this pericope is the testing of their integrity and not discipline. But a discipline of sorts is involved in the testing through their fear and mental anguish.

³⁵Wayne E. Oates, The Revelation of God in Human Suffering (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 36, 37.

³⁶Webster's New World Dictionary. These terms were clarified in my mind via definitions gained from Webster's.

Leviticus 26:18, 21, 23, 28. God is speaking to his people via Moses. The key words are "if you do contrary to me and do not hearken to me, I will chastise you sevenfold." Verses 40-42 complete the idea of suffering that is inflicted with the intention of having them repent. The progression of suffering does not lead to complete destruction as in Deut. 28. The sevenfold remark refers to the completeness of the discipline. In this context, it is helpful to note that passages that use blessings and curses may fit properly in both the retributive and disciplinary perspectives.

Deuteronomy 4:29-40. This passage by its particular placement speaks of the disciplinary action of God through national suffering. The previous verses paint a gloomy picture of national destruction, but v. 29 begins a note of hope - that there is a purpose behind the destruction. Clearly within these verses (v. 30, 36) the idea of returning to God out of tribulation is distinct.

Deuteronomy 8:5. A summary statement regarding the discipline that must have been felt during the desert years of Israel's corporate life. Suffering is implied in their forty years of wandering.

Deuteronomy 11:1-7. The author is looking back of Israel's history and remembering the numerous occasions of

suffering that were used by God to teach his people. The word in verse 2, "discipline", may also be translated as instruction. Through their own suffering and the suffering of others, God was making his will known. For the Pharaoh's army the suffering was retributive; but for Israel who was watching, it was teaching the lesson of faithful obedience.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21. Advice and instruction come from within the cultic community regarding the severe discipline of a rebellious son. If he does not respond to their attempts at chastisement (presumably beating with rod), then he will be stoned to death at the city gate by the elders and all the men of the city. Discipline turns into retribution, and retribution here becomes a discipline (warning) for others.

Deuteronomy 22:13-21. This pericope deals with the discipline of a man who falsely accuses his wife of not being a virgin. If he is guilty of falsely challenging her integrity, he must pay a monetary fine. If the woman is found to be guilty of not being a virgin, then she is stoned to death. Depending upon the man's financial condition, the fine might cause some suffering. Certainly the retribution placed on the woman would serve as a warning to other women.

II Samuel 7:14-15. God is speaking to David via Nathan. In Nathan's vision, God is declaring that his re-

lationship with David will be like that of father and son. The father loves his son and disciplines him with the rod and whip. He will not withdraw his love from David as he did with Saul.

I Kings 12:11, 14; II Chronicles 10:11, 14. The people were punished for their mistakes which were made under Solomon's rule. Rehoboam seeks to discipline them severely with a whip that had studded spokes in it. For a more detailed description see Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 3, p. 115. Scorpions refer to this unusually cruel whip. The ideas of both retribution and discipline are incorporated here.

Job 4:1-6. Eliphaz is speaking to Job. He reminds him that he (Job) once gave instruction to strengthen those around him. Job's ways must have been rough before he was inflicted. Eliphaz equates his instruction, strength, and words with the pain that Job is presently experiencing. The concept of discipline through suffering is clearer in Job's afflictions than in his ability to teach.

Job 5:7. Job is reminded by Eliphaz that a man who is disciplined by God is happy. Therefore, he suggests to Job that he not take his present condition lightly.

Job 33:12-33. Elihu is the speaker. He emphasizes the thought that God terrifies man through dreams to bring

him back to his way (15-17). Dreams may cause mental anguish. That is one way God seeks to encourage the return of his people. The second way is through physical pain as described in v. 19. Hardship and verbal instruction are two more ways by which God seeks to redeem his children. Then the end result of man accepting God is found in v. 26. This may be speaking of man's first encounter with God rather than the process of repentance after a relationship has been established. Certainly it is possible to think that if it worked a first time, then it might be effective a second time.

Job 36:5-12. Elihu speaks to Job regarding the way that God teaches the individual. Being bound and caught in affliction provides the opportunity for God to declare to the individual his sins and to open his mind to repentance. The key verses are 8-10; same thought is reiterated in 36:15.

Job 40:2. A clearer translation of the Hebrew is offered by Sanders, "Should an admonisher contend with the Almighty; let him who rebukes or reproves God answer it." Sanders suggests that the implication here is that Job is at once one who admonishes (warns) his three friends about suffering and at the same time one who is warned by God through his own suffering.³⁷

³⁷Sanders, p. 31.

Psalms 2:1-11. The psalmist expresses a warning with a threat of suffering to the leader of a conspiracy (v. 1). He is saying that God knows of the plot (v.4) and will crush it if they don't learn their lesson before it is too late. This admonishment does not involve actual suffering. The potentiality of suffering becomes the motivation to learn.

Psalms 6:1-10. The poet interprets his suffering as being from God. He desires to be relieved from his present pain. It is through this physical pain that he has become aware of his sin and God's mercy. The psalmist is in the very process of returning to God. His suffering has brought him to that point.

Psalms 16:7. God's counsel, as we have seen, has been traditionally manifested in terrible dreams and physical pain. Here the poet is aware of those elements and wishes to be made more perfect. No suffering is mentioned, but it is implied.

Psalms 38:1-22. This hymn begins (v.2) like 6:2 above. The psalmist confesses his sin and is regretful for his wrongdoing. His suffering has opened his eyes to God as his salvation (v.17-22).

Psalms 39:1-13. The key verse is 11. The poet interprets his previous suffering as having come from God

as chastisement for his sins. He is fully aware of God's power and man's finitude. As one who is outside the fold, the poet merits God's disciplinary attention. In v.13, this man wants the anonymity of being back in God's care before he dies.

Psalms 50:17. In God's address to the wicked, he cites the fact that they are not changed by his discipline. In addition, they despise his correction. No suffering is mentioned. The wicked are members of the cultic community who do not practice their religion in everyday life but are engaged in imaginary piety. The future judgment of God is a threat of suffering couched in the contrasting promise of salvation for the faithful."³⁸

Psalms 66:1-12. This is the first half of a personal testimony regarding God's salvation. Our focus is on 10-12 where the poet recognizes that human sin and God's judgment on that sin has necessarily taken the cultic community through great tribulation, adversity, and hardship. But this process, he recognizes, has brought them into a saving relationship with God.

Psalms 73:13-16. The poet is in the midst of a great crisis characterized by distress and despair. He has suffered greatly but cannot discover the purpose that God

³⁸Weiser, p. 398.

has in this affliction. The implication is that he anticipates that his suffering will have some meaning other than just punishment. It's interesting to note that God does not directly rescue him, but rather God in the midst of his congregation. This hymn will also be in the mysterious category.

Psalms 90:9-17. The psalmist feels that he can greatly appreciate the days of his life because affliction (i.e., God's anger and wrath) has taught how important those days were that were spent in relationship with God (v.12).

Psalms 94:8-15. This passage emphasizes the fact that the God who instructs man in the ways of knowledge and wisdom through the Torah is the same one who disciplines individuals and nations. Salvation is attained by those who submit to God's instruction and chastisement. Suffering is implied in chastisement.

Psalms 107:11-17. These two verses (11 and 17) point up the sin of those who were suffering. While there are four separate scenes, only these two speak directly of the disobedience and wrongdoing. But each of the four scenes recounts how the oppressed are received back from dangerous or difficult situations by God. Discipline is clear in the first two and may be inferred in the last two.

Psalms 118:15-18. This is a song or liturgy of national thanksgiving which reflects a movement from suffering to salvation as experienced by the speaker (may be community or individual). It was suffering that taught the speaker to take refuge in the Lord (8-9). This experience also brought the speaker to the realization that he was afflicted by his enemies because God wanted to guide him into a new understanding of life. God's guiding discipline brought him to the point where he could witness in word and deed to God's power and authority.

Psalms 119:65-72. The psalmist confesses that it took affliction (presumably from God) to direct him back to the statutes of God. He is even able to rejoice in his suffering because it saved him from a life of wickedness.

Proverbs 1:8. A believer is admonished to listen and abide by his father's discipline and his mother's teaching. Sanders points out that the father, traditionally speaking, gave out stringent discipline or instruction after an act of disobedience. Whereas the mother instructed the child without the idea of discipline or pain.³⁹

Proverbs 3:11-12. This passage relates the same idea, as mentioned above, to the Lord. He is the one who gives discipline and reproof. Suffering is not mentioned

³⁹Sanders, p. 33.

and may not always be a necessary part of discipline.

Proverbs 9:7. Here is a switch in our understanding and perception. It is an unusual situation where a teacher is injured and made to suffer at the hands of the wicked one he had tried to teach. This is interesting but not beneficial to our category.

Proverbs 13:24. The father who does not discipline his son with a rod does not love him. Discipline results in suffering.

Proverbs 15:9-10. The Lord seeks to change the wicked through severe discipline and those who do not respond will die.

Proverbs 19:18. Sanders states that this couplet is understood better in conjunction with Proverbs 13:24 and Deut. 21:18. Suffering is implied in this particular parental admonition.

Proverbs 22:15. A child's foolishness is corrected by discipline which applies the rod. Suffering results from parental instruction. Same idea in 23:13; 29:15, 17.

Proverbs 24:30-34. A man learns a lesson from the suffering of another person. A lazy farmer brings hardship and poverty on himself.

Isaiah 9:13. This verse implies that the smiting was done in order to return the people to their former faithfulness.

Isaiah 26:16-17. The nation had been in distress because God was chastening her. He had frustrated her plans to conquer the world (v.16). Pain is plain and compared to child birth.

Isaiah 28:23-29. The prophet is proclaiming the message that no one "only harvests." There are cycles or phases of farming: preparation, planting, weeding, and reaping. The implication is that the nation will not continue forever to reap God's punishment in their hardships. Because it has a limit, it may be deduced that the hardships will bring them to repentance.

Isaiah 53:4-6. The kings of the surrounding nations have become aware of Israel's suffering. They have understood it to be punishment. Indeed, it was and on a national scale. But it was more. The kings now realize that the servant had borne the discipline and retribution that they deserved. A lesson is learned by observing the suffering of another, in this case, a nation. Because the servant endured, he won forgiveness of their sins and removal of divine discipline for the kings. This text fits in another perspective, too.

Jeremiah 1:13-16. Retributive and disciplinary action is described in the vision of the boiling pot from the north. The residents of the land will be punished for forsaking the Lord and worshipping other gods. It is only from the context of the whole book that this action can be seen as disciplinary.

Jeremiah 2:1-37. In an indictment, God speaks against Jerusalem. He announces in proper legal fashion the charge, the evidence, the verdict, and the sentence. Of particular interest are verses 19 and 30. Verse 19 speaks of God's decision to let the people suffer the consequences of their own sin. This action will awaken Israel to her sins and bring her back into the true faith. In v.30, God describes how he afflicted the previous generation with the design of bringing repentance. But it was to no avail. The discipline through suffering failed to move Jerusalem's inhabitants.

Jeremiah 5:1-3. The prophet is reporting to God that no one has responded to his discipline. From v.3, it is clear that suffering was involved in this action. Not only did it not work, but the discipline made the people more obstinate.

Jeremiah 6:8. God speaks to Jerusalem warning her that if she does not accept his guiding discipline, he will

destroy her.

Jeremiah 7:13, 14 and 28. God speaks to Jeremiah of the wickedness of the people (v.8f) and of the punishment he will inflict upon them. It is uncertain whether the action at Shiloh was retributive or disciplinary. We can only imagine that it was painful. It is unlikely that God would threaten someone with something pleasant.

Jeremiah 10:24. It is uncertain whether this is Jeremiah's prayer for the people or their prayer for themselves. Clearly, the sense of divine discipline through suffering is present even if the recipients would like to temper it.

Jeremiah 12:14-17. What may be a redactor's comment includes in it the spirit of punishment, compassion, return, and final threat of annihilation. Therefore, one can suggest that this implies the theme of discipline. Through their suffering they should return to the Lord. If they don't listen and learn, they will be utterly destroyed.

Jeremiah 18:1-10. Couched in the illustration of a potter reworking a lump of clay, Jeremiah learns and speaks God's word. If the people will repent and change their ways, God will withhold the punishment that he has planned. It may be stretching the illustration too far, but the reworking of clay is a process of breaking down the

damaged or imperfect pieces and remolding them into something useful.

Jeremiah 30:10-11. Within the promise of salvation is the clear statement that God will discipline his wayward people. It is understood from the wording that the treatment will not be pleasant, but it will be fair; v.14 supports this understanding.

Jeremiah 31:18. Ephraim has learned the proper lesson through suffering and is requesting to be received back into God's favor.

Jeremiah 32:26-44. God addresses Jeremiah. He gives him the accounting of Israel's and Judah's sins, the punishment they shall receive and the promise of restoration. The punishment may be correctly understood as divine discipline.

Ezekiel 5:13-17. The Lord speaks to the prophet the message that the people will witness his destructive ways. The destructive power will be a lesson to them. They shall learn by witnessing their own suffering. The idea of discipline is only seen in the context of 5:1-12 where a third shall live but be scattered into foreign nations. For that remnant, it shall be a lesson as well as to the other nations who already display more of God's righteousness

and justice than Israel.⁴⁰

Ezekiel 23:46-49. The retribution laid upon the two sisters will be harsh. While it is retribution to them, it will serve as a warning to all who see and hear about it. A lesson is learned through the observation of another's suffering.

Hosea 5:2. God is speaking through the prophet to the religious and political leaders, those who are responsible for the spiritual and moral welfare of the people. He promises to discipline them because of their wrongdoing. The same idea is conveyed in 7:12, 10:10. "In the three passages in Hosea, if we retain yasai and do not change the pointing to forms of 'asar', then we have God's instructing the people through direct harsh action, by snaring them in nets and the like."⁴¹

Hosea 11:8 and 9. Captured in these few verses is Hosea's unique contribution to the interpretation of suffering. It is no longer just for punishment because God loves his people and wants them back. He does not want them to be like Admah or Zeboiim. "His distinctive contribution is in his interpretation of the significance of the punishment for sin. It does not come merely as a reward for wicked-

⁴⁰Walther Eichrodt, Ezekiel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 78-91.

⁴¹Sanders, p. 20.

ness . . . Its purpose is redemptive . . . God will use Israel's suffering to purify and redeem her. It will bring her to her senses and make possible her restoration."⁴²

Amos 4:6. Implied in this one verse is the fact that God caused a famine in order to lead his people to repentance.

Jonah 1 and 2. These chapters present the activities of God who sought to bring Jonah back into his service. Affliction through the storm and the story of the great fish were brought about to force a return to the Lord.

Zephaniah 3:2. Jerusalem has refused to respond to God. She neither trusts him nor learns from his discipline. "In not accepting their plight as instruction through divine discipline, they did not draw near to God. Two important points: a lesson learned through suffering and discipline has the purpose of drawing the recipient closer to God."⁴³

Zephaniah 3:6 and 7. Clearly the destruction had the intent to correct the people of Jerusalem. The suffering discipline did not change their lives.

⁴²Clyde T. Francisco, "Evil and Suffering in the Book of Hosea" Southwest Journal of Theology, V (April 1963), 39.

⁴³Sanders, p. 10.

Luke 13:1-5. Those people who observed or heard about the death of the 18 were to learn a lesson: repent or perish. Observation and testimony of suffering served as a warning.

Luke 15:15-19. Through his painful experience in foreign lands, the prodigal son learned of his father's love. Note that the father does not cause the suffering, but it is the natural consequences of sinful action. The result is the return of the son to the father.

Romans 5:3-5. Physical pain and mental anguish can produce an upbuilding of character, a growth of personality, and an increase in spiritual depth. Some suffering - for Paul all suffering - may be educational.

1 Corinthians 11:32. Paul speaks of chastening by God as part of his judgment on a Christian's sins. The word for chasten is παιδεύω which is rendered by Thayer's⁴⁴ as the infliction of evils and calamities. Discipline is implied in that they won't be condemned with the rest of the world.

II Corinthians 12:7-10. The apostle identifies a physical affliction which, he understands it to be from God, is to teach him a lesson: God gives power in weakness.

⁴⁴J. H. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book, 1886), p. 472.

He tends to interpret all of his hardships and tribulations in this light - a lesson from God.

Hebrews 2:10. G. Clinard suggests that this passage reflects a disciplinary understanding.⁴⁵ I agree if he means that "being made perfect" refers to a process of discipline.

Hebrews 5:8 and 9. The author, correctly or not, views Jesus as being made more obedient through his experiences of suffering. Possibly he has in mind the human element of the incarnation since it is difficult imagining the divine nature becoming more anything.

Hebrews 12:5-11. The quote in v. 5 and 6 is very similar to Proverbs 3:11 and 12. Suffering is clearly meant to bring back a wayward son. The implication is that God works through suffering to discipline, punish, and guide his children. The theme is reiterated in v. 11.

Revelation 3:19. It, too, is similar to Proverbs 3:11-12. The author understands that God in Christ reproves and chastens those who are neutral and complacent in matters of the faith. Suffering is implied in the word Παίδεσις - chasten. See Thayer's p. 472.

⁴⁵Clinard, p. 20.

Conclusion. The majority of passages that we have considered support the preconceived perspective that suffering was used for discipline. It grew out of the prophets' interpretation that God's painful punishment had a purpose. That purpose was to bring the recipient back into the faith. There were passages that reflected the idea that one could learn a lesson from suffering; not only one's own but also the observed suffering of another. In a few cases, suffering served as a warning to prevent the people from going astray. There are only limited references to suffering as being used to build one's character or personality. God uses suffering to make his disciples aware of their sin and limited nature and to establish them in an obedient relationship.

Probationary and Evidential.

A third biblical view of suffering is that pain and anguish can be probationary and evidential. For this understanding, it is assumed that the world is evil and the faithful must endure this age of wickedness until God is ready to initiate his judgment on the world. This view emerged out of a conflict which focused on the success of the evildoers and the failure of those who were considered righteous before God. "The problem in Scripture is not why suffering exists, but why it afflicts some people and not others. The problem is not the fact of suffering, but its

distribution. Why do the wicked prosper, while those who try to keep faith with God suffer?"⁴⁶

In this wicked age or probationary period, a person's faith was submitted to a rigid test which would determine its genuineness. In the Old Testament, the advice was passed on from wise to less wise that it would be more productive to concentrate on God and leave the wicked to themselves. "The advice was given not to be preoccupied with the wicked, even if they seemed to be prospering. It is better to ignore them and leave them on one side and concentrate instead on the more positive aspects of relationship with God."⁴⁷ In the New Testament Jesus and his disciples came to understand that suffering was a natural part of keeping the faith. One could not be a Christian without, at some time, walking through the portals of pain and mental anguish. "This struggle is seen as inevitable for the Christian life and hence is evidence that one is a Christian."⁴⁸

The believer who held to this view also had hope and confidence in the retributive view. Their belief was that they would get their just reward when God was ready; and likewise, but in opposite fashion, would the non-believer.

⁴⁶Bowker, p. 9.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁸Clinard, p. 21.

The previous perspective suggested that suffering opened us up to the grace of God. This category seeks to prove to God and the world that we are indeed "graced by God."⁴⁹ Suffering which is patiently endured demonstrates the true person of God.

Genesis 22:1-19. This is the story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac. The key for our study is found in vv. 1, 12. God tested Abraham and found that he was faithful. This was particularly difficult for he had already cut off his past history by his move from Mesopotamia (12:1f). This was a test to see if he would cut off his visible future. The story of Abraham deals with the "idea of a radical test of obedience."⁵⁰

Genesis 42-44. The encounter of Joseph and his brothers after years of separation, provides an opportunity for a test. It fits on the outside edge of this perspective. The idea of testing (man by man) through suffering is seen in 44:3-17. Joseph seeks to test his brothers' spiritual, ethical, and moral development. Will they leave Benjamin as they have left Joseph? Benjamin is purposefully isolated as if he alone were responsible for the theft. This provides the brothers with the opportunity to go free

⁴⁹ Cleary, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Rad, Genesis, p. 244.

without Benjamin, and to justify themselves before their father. "Joseph's test was that he constructed a situation in which it had to become evident whether they would again act as they once had done or whether they had changed in the meantime."⁵¹ Mental anguish is the only kind of suffering we can assume. This test is not given by God nor does it give any direct evidence of their faith in God.

Deut. 13:1-5. A prophet or dreamer is set apart by the community and is allowed to propose that Israel serve and worship foreign gods. This is a test given by God to see if the people are loyal and will continue to follow Him. No suffering is involved in the test even though the false prophet is killed.

Judges 2:16-23. The key is v. 22, "that by them I may test Israel." The writer believed that God left the objects of foreign worship in the midst of Israel to test her obedience and loyalty to Him. There is no mention of suffering connected with this test although the passage implies a retributive or disciplinary theme.

Job 1:1-2:10. The central theme of the Prologue is that God tests Job to discover his fidelity and obedience. The devil is not the satanic personification of later years, but rather is a court prosecutor whose job it is to ques-

⁵¹Ibid., p. 393.

tion the integrity of God's faithful witnesses. Suffering is basic in this testing process. Satan conjectures that Job is faithful only because of the material blessings bestowed upon him by God. God allows a test (1:13-2:8). Job remains faithful and displays disinterested piety as a believer (1:21, 2:10). The only other mention of a test is in 23:10 where Job says, "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." The inference from the gold processing is that he is enduring a fiery trial. Job interprets his pains as from God as some sort of test since (v. 12) he has not departed from God's way.

Psalms 37:1-40. This hymn is an appeal to a suffering person who is distressed by the success of the wicked. Implicit in it are the exhortations to be patient (2,5,7,10etc.) as the wicked will receive their just retribution (9,10,13,15,17). There is, however, no mention of this suffering as a test or as evidence of genuine faith.

Psalms 58:1-11. This Psalm, like 82, refers to some servants of God (heavenly most likely) who have failed to do their jobs. The people implicitly suffer because of their dereliction of duty. The sense of patient endurance is a hidden undercurrent in the Psalm. The retributive theme connected to the suffering has surfaced in v. 6-10.

Psalms 66:10-12. The faithful people of God are tested by physical pain and then brought to their reward. It is the way prescribed by God. "The way to salvation . . . is the via crucis that leads man through temptations, through prison's oppression, through humiliations, and defeats, through all sorts of mortal dangers and through human failures and despair . . . It is precisely because the history of suffering is the history of God's hidden grace which leads to salvation that this deadly serious meditation on the way of the cross of the people of God is fully justified in its prominent place in the jubilant praise of God."⁵²

Psalms 72:1-28. The poet begins with a confession that he was jealous of the wicked for their success. He recounts vividly how they flaunted themselves. The counterpart of this man's suffering is seen in its absence. "They are not troubled." He is troubled. "They are not stricken." He is. In v. 13-14 he points up his faithful endurance of suffering. We can assume that this was both physical pain and mental anguish in light of his confession and the silent counterpoint. His hope is found in patient endurance (implied, 23-26) and the sense of retribution that will eventually overtake the wicked (27). The affliction is interpreted by H. W. Robinson as being a privilege defin-

⁵²Weiser, pp. 470-71.

itely not a penalty.⁵³ Cleary says that the poet finds personal suffering to be proof of God's love and concern; that is, suffering can be evidential to the sufferer himself.⁵⁴

Psalms 75:1-10. There is no mention of suffering on the part of those who are trying to keep faith with God. They may be in pain or in a neutral position. It is uncertain. The poet does lift up the theme that the righteous will be faithful and endure while the wicked, who exalt themselves, will be cast down. This is addressed to those righteous ones who are impatient with God's lack of action in regard to the well-doing of the evildoers.

Psalms 92:5-9. The Psalmist does not make mention of any personal pain or anguish. He notes the fact that the faithful will be able to endure life and that the evildoers (who we must assume are in control) will perish in time.

Psalms 94:1-23. The feeling level of the poet is quite visible. He is in agony over the activities of the evildoers. They are arrogant, ruthless, and brutal as the widows, orphans, and travelers are killed. The Psalm begins with the theme of retribution which is common for this probationary perspective. The reasons are plainly pre-

⁵³Robinson, p. 40.

⁵⁴Cleary, p. 3.

sented. A statement of reassurance is uttered to those who are suffering and in doubt about God's lack of help. There appears to be a hymn of thanksgiving (12-23) for God's action that he will visit upon the wicked. The themes of patient endurance and retribution are clear. There is no mention of a test.

Psalms 127:1-9. This Psalm speaks of those who were exiled into the land of Babylon from Jerusalem, probably in 587 B.C. and of their awful torment by arrogant oppressors. Couched in rage and hatred is the hope in God's power to restore the kingdom and display his righteousness before the nations. This display, by way of revenge, will show the foreign nations who is really in control. Patient endurance of the remnant, even if they must view themselves as sinful (or else God would not have allowed this to happen), is implicit in vv. 1-6. "The Psalmist turns to God - but not to ask him to avenge him for the humiliation he has personally suffered; it is faith in the power of God which is here at stake. The reason why the Psalmist calls down God's punishment on the enemy is in order to show with whom the final decision rests . . ."⁵⁵

Ecclesiastes 8:10-14. The text is corrupt and very difficult to translate. What seems to be clear is that the righteous sometimes get the rewards that the wicked deserve

⁵⁵Weiser, p. 796.

and vice versa. There is no explanation for this other than the mystery of God's infinite wisdom which cannot be grasped by finite minds. Somehow (v.13) the wicked will finally get what they properly deserve as will the righteous (implied) who wait patiently.

Isaiah 48:9-11. This text is not without difficulty. The best understanding of v.10 seems to be "I refined you like silver but there was nothing but dross to be found."⁵⁶ The nation of Israel was tested by God and they had failed the test (48:1ff). But in spite of their faithlessness, he would use them. This pericope may also fit appropriately in the disciplinary section. The sense of the passage seems to be that God tested them and they failed, which would make it also fit here.

Jeremiah 6:27-30. The prophet is seen as an assayer and tester of the nation. He is to understand their habits and, if bad, then he is to purify them. This test is given by God through Jeremiah. The people, who are not suffering, refuse correction and fail the test. The word image is powerful. The assayer adds lead to a crucible of silver. When heated, the lead oxidizes and carries off the impurities. Only pure, genuine silver remains. Likewise, the people are tested. We can only assume that the heat was

⁵⁶R. B. Y. Scott, "Isaiah: Exposition" in Interpreter's Bible (1953), V, 557.

painfully endured. But the conclusion by the assayer was that the suffering could not carry off all of the impurities in the people. There was no genuine faith left in the crucible.⁵⁷

Habakkuk 1:13; 2:6-20. The prophet asks God, How can you honor an evil nation like the Chaldeans? His answer, which is found in 2:6-20, is to wait patiently for the retributive principle to be put into effect. This, according to Robinson, is a quality of faithfulness which is displayed by the suffering righteous man. Such loyalty and fidelity prove the quality of faith. Man is not dependent on material support and visible signs to believe in God (3:17, 18).

Zechariah 13:7-9. This passage points to the purging and purifying of Israel. Two-thirds of the nation will be wiped out as the Lord uses suffering to gain a small but fully-committed remnant. Even this small group will be tested like silver and gold, which is no easy process, as we have seen. Out of the testing will come a new community. God uses suffering to test the quality of his people's faith.

Malachi 2:17, 3:14-4:3. The prophet deals with the problem of evildoers who have apparently escaped God's

⁵⁷Idea detailed by James P. Hyatt, "Jeremiah: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953), V, 867.

retribution. They put him to the test and he does not act to punish them. It is a mockery. Those who are righteous are reminded to be patient (3:16, 17) as the Lord will act in good time. When the day of judgment arrives, those faithful few will be rewarded for enduring that difficult period when all seemed contrary to God.

Matthew 5:11-12. Jesus addresses the crowds explaining to them that his followers will be persecuted. "When" is the time that it will happen even though the fixed hour is unknown as opposed to "if" it should occur. Suffering, either physical pain or mental anguish, will be experienced by Jesus' disciples. The sense of retribution is partially present in the recognition of a reward in heaven.

Mark 13:9-13. The author speaks vividly of the shame, disgrace, and physical abuse that will overcome the disciples. Jesus continues to make his followers aware of the family difficulties that they will encounter just because they are Christians. Their hope lies in endurance since God will save them in the end - a test of faithfulness. Parallel in Luke 21:12-19.

John 15:18-21. Jesus is speaking. He relates the fact that his disciples will suffer mental anguish, at least, because they are connected with him. Since the world hated and persecuted Jesus, it will do the same to

his followers. Suffering, then, is evidence that they are followers if it is endured for his name's sake. "He speaks of a basic enmity with the world which assures suffering."⁵⁶

Acts 5:40-42. Some disciples are beaten by local religious leaders. They rejoice because they believe God has counted them worthy to suffer for his name. This experience gives testimony to the true nature and character of their faith.

Acts 9:10-18. God speaks to Ananias regarding Saul. The Lord tells Ananias that Saul will suffer for his name's sake (v. 16). There is no mention of reward or patient endurance; the only connection is that he becomes a believer through this blindness. It does not say this is true for all Christians, but rather just for Saul.

Acts 14:19-23. Following his own stoning, Paul forewarns and exhorts the disciples of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch that the way to the kingdom of God is necessarily through rough times. These tribulations are not stated as a test or evidence, though it might be implied since one would be a faithful believer to travel that path.

Romans 8:15-17. The apostle Paul believes that Christians share in the rich heritage that is Christ's

⁵⁸Ulinard, p. 21.

provided they prove themselves by enduring similar tribulations and afflictions. Christ endured patiently, so should we. He was glorified as a result of his endurance, so shall we be.

I Corinthians 4:8-13. God uses his apostles to show forth his power (silent counterpoint). The apostles are very poor samples of this mighty God, (Who would believe in a God whose representatives are so treated?) In spite of and through all of this physical and mental abuse, the apostles are glowing evidence of God's power (v. 20).

I Corinthians 12:26. This verse is not applicable to our category. It does not refer to a test, nor a period of faithful endurance, nor the distribution of suffering among the righteous and wicked. It does speak of the relational nature of the body of Christ.

II Corinthians 1:3-7. Paul is speaking to the Corinthian Church. He states the observation that those who suffer affliction are better able to comfort those who suffer the same or similar pains. A sub-point is that comfort and salvation are not effected by sufferings that are patiently endured. While this is a valuable comment, it is difficult to fit into any of our perspectives. Possibly it shows forth the need to create a tenth perspective - the fellowship of suffering.

I Corinthians 6:3-10. Paul relates the fact that as servants of God they have faced and endured great hardship, affliction, and punishment of both man and nature. He offers these as their credentials of authenticity.

II Corinthians 11:21-29. Paul enumerates his own personal sufferings as further evidence that his integrity and authority are from God. Not in his strength but in his weakness, God has chosen him as a faithful witness. This is the second time that Paul mentions these kinds of sufferings. It appears that he is convinced that he is faced with tribulation and affliction as a result of being a Christian. Since the world is against Christ, it is against Paul. While there is no mention of a test, there is implied a period to be faithful as Christ was faithful.

II Corinthians 12:10. Reaffirms my previous observation that Paul, while strengthened by God, is able to endure these difficulties for the sake of Christ.

Galatians 6:17. Paul responds to inquiries about his relationship to God through Christ. As a believer, he has endured suffering; relating back to those experiences in II Cor. 11:21-29. There is no mention of a test or of a future reward and punishment. It is only as a Christian that he has borne physical suffering.

Philippians 1:27-30. Paul addresses the Christians at Philippi regarding the faith experiences of disciples. There are two; first is the ability to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior; and the second is to suffer, like Paul, for his sake. The wording seems to imply that not all who believe will be called upon to suffer. But those who are so called, share a close fellowship with others who suffer. There is no test or mention of the uneven distribution of suffering among the righteous. Their faith may have some bearing on their ability to suffer, but it is uncertain. Also, the retribution principle is implied in v. 28. "God has so favored them that they are placed in circumstances which enable them to test their faith and learn more of its meaning. Paul found that faith becomes more real through suffering."⁵⁹

Colossians 1:24-29. The church at Colossa did not know Paul. He shared with them his observation that as an apostle, by necessity, he had suffered in his work for the church. "He cannot look upon them (sufferings) as disastrous, or even as unfortunate, since they are necessary consequences of the high service in which he is engaged."⁶⁰

I Thessalonians 1:6-10. Implied in this passage is the fact that as these people became Christians they did so

⁵⁹Robert R. Wicks, "Philippians: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953), XI, 41.

⁶⁰Francis W. Beare, "Colossians: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953), XI, 177.

under much difficulty. What kind we do not know. Their faithfulness during this period of affliction served to make them an example to other believers. Implicit in v.10 is the deliverance from this age. The mention of the parousia would refer to the judgment of God on the righteous and the wicked. They had a hope that enabled them to endure whatever hardship and suffering they might encounter as Christians.

I Thessalonians 2:13-16. Paul, alluding back to 1:6f, re-emphasizes their acceptance of the gospel amid suffering and their ability to remain faithful through such difficulties as were common both to the preacher and receiver of the gospel. The mention of the punishment due to the sinful people is new. Retribution has finally taken place - whether it was the destruction of the temple or moral decay is not certain. I Thess. 3:3 speaks of the suffering that is inevitable for these Christians.

II Thessalonians 1:5-10. This pericope combines all of the elements of this perspective. These Christians were being made worthy through their affliction and persecution. They were being tested, refined, and proven to be of God's kingdom through suffering. With passion, it speaks vividly of the retributive principle. Those evildoers will be punished justly for their terrible deeds. And those who endure, patiently, trusting in God, will be rewarded.

II Timothy 1:11, 12. It is assumed that the call to be preacher, apostle, and teacher involves suffering. Suffering could be evidence that one was engaged in right action for God since the world hated Christians. There is no mention that suffering is for every Christian.

II Timothy 2:3. The call to share suffering was the call of ministry. Paul or the author was a good example of one who suffered. The illustration of the soldier points up the fact that every soldier is expected to suffer hardship and affliction in the normal line of duty. The image of the soldier was one of a person who was disciplined, obedient, and loyal. Those good soldiers of God were faithful even in times of suffering.

II Timothy 3:10-13. It is best summed up by this statement, "The credentials of the true Christian are his scars."⁶¹ The concept that the righteous will be saved is found in v. 13 as is the belief that the wicked will be left to themselves and their deeds.

James 1:2-4. Within these verses are mentioned various trials, which in Greek can properly be understood as external hardships or inner impulses to evil and temptation. The idea of a test is clear. Suffering which is

⁶¹Fred D. Gealy, "II Timothy: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953), XI, 50f.

endured produces faithfulness. "Here the point is that trials, which most men regard as evils to be avoided, should be accepted joyfully by Christians; since it is by overcoming difficulties that moral progress is achieved."⁶² It is interesting to note that there is nothing distinctively Christian about the book of James. The retributive view is seen in v. 12 where the righteous will receive the crown of life.

I Peter 1:6-7. The author speaks to those whose faith will be tested for its genuineness through physical hardships. This passage refers back to the assayer's process found first in Jeremiah. These trials are not certain but they may be encountered. Implied is the reward of shared glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion. Our study has revealed that in both the Old Testament and New Testament, there is a strong understanding that God caused or allowed suffering in order to test the fidelity and genuineness of his people's faith. Such loyalty in the midst of suffering created a hope and assurance that, in the future, God would execute his justice. The righteous would share in the glory of their Lord while the wicked would finally receive their just desserts.

⁶²Gordon Poteat, "James: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953), XII, 21.

"Therefore, the patient endurance of trials fills the Christian with joy; for it brings the conviction that such fidelity in the midst of messianic tribulations provides a pledge of salvation at the time of the parousia."⁶³ When a Christian shares in the messianic sufferings it insures an even greater participation in the messianic rewards.

Equally as clear was the emphasis on the acceptance of suffering as the natural lot of the believer. This was particularly evident in the New Testament. Trials and tribulations were encountered in the process of propagating and practicing the faith. Something we did not note earlier was that this feeling led to the relief of suffering on a very basic and human level. "On the practical side, Acts makes it abundantly clear that discipleship involves suffering, particularly in persecution and that also involves practical activity in the relief of suffering."⁶⁴ Pain and anguish can be the natural and inevitable consequences of being a believer.

Some of the passages emphasized the possibility or probability while others stated clearly that suffering was the doorway to the kingdom through which everyone must walk. "Suffering hurts as much as ever, and continues to

⁶³Barnabas Ahern, "The Fellowship of His Suffering," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XX (January 1960), 3.

⁶⁴Bowker, pp. 76, 77.

⁶⁵Tigner, p. 403.

have its original problem of endurance; but in the New Testament it presents no perplexity to faith; the mortal sufferings of good and bad don't embarrass the Christian confidence in God's government. It is now taken for granted that there is no way from man's present situation to the kingdom of God except through a valley of suffering and a field of trial."⁶⁵

Revelational

The fourth perspective is entitled revelational because some element or characteristic of God is revealed to his follower(s) through physical pain and mental anguish. It is much more implicit than explicit in comparison to the other categories. This interpretation suggests that suffering enables a person to come into closer relationship with God. This deeper knowledge of God also affects a person's understanding of himself and other people. Physical suffering is the means by which a person obtains the goal of knowing God more fully. "In the crucible of suffering, many may actually meet God in deepening fellowship because of help which comes from God in that crisis."⁶⁶ In part, suffering can reveal the nature of God himself.

The most frequent examples of this revelational understanding are found in the lives of Hosea, Jeremiah,

⁶⁵Tigner, p. 403.

⁶⁶Ferguson, p. 16.

and Jesus. It is here that the information is implicit in their stories.

Hosea's difficult task was to call Israel to repentance and lead her back to genuine faith. His message emphasized social justice which was more evident of real worship than formal prayers and liturgies. If the people displayed love, mercy, and concern toward the poor and afflicted, they would avoid certain destruction.

Hosea received a revelation of God's loving kindness and forgiveness toward his people in and through his own personal experience of suffering. It was mental and emotional tribulations rather than physical abuses. His wife abandoned him for other men. She was open and arrogant about her extra-marital affairs. Hosea had every justification to divorce her outright and had community support as well. But he realized that he still loved her in spite of her repulsive actions. He decided to continue to love her with the hope that she would see the error of her ways and return to him. He knew that he would always love her. His revelation came when he understood that this was the way that God loved Israel. Even though she had prostituted herself by following other gods, Yahweh would still and always love her. Hosea's personal agony revealed one element of this mysterious nature of God's character.

Jeremiah was another who learned more of God's nature through his personal suffering. His suffering grew

out of the hostility that came from the crowds when he announced God's word of judgment. He soon became frustrated, isolated, and threatened with physical harm. Jeremiah felt abandoned by both God and man. He didn't seem to have the ability to control his own life. Having accepted God's call, he was set apart - outside of the community-support systems - without a family to comfort and console him. He even was without friends with whom to share his deep feelings and frustrations. Hated, rejected, alone, Jeremiah learned how God felt as Israel hated and rejected him. This was a new insight which was gained through suffering.

Jesus, as most Christians believe, is God's supreme revelation to all the world. Jesus said that those who had seen him had also seen his Father. The way Jesus lived, his style and personality, showed forth the nature of God. His deep love and concern for those who were rejected and lost, his fiery rebukes of those who misused their religious power, his gentleness and sensitivity all mirror the nature of God.

Most particularly, Jesus' death on the cross revealed, and continues to reveal, the unfathomable reaches of God's love for the world. "The cross, which had until then been symbolic of the ultimate in lawlessness and brutality, now becomes the supreme revelation of God's love for all men."⁶⁷ God reveals himself in many ways. One

⁶⁷Cleary, p. 4.

sure way is through human suffering, most significantly that of Jesus.

Job 6:24-26. Job is asking for insight into the errors that Eliphaz has suggested that he has made which are the apparent cause of his suffering. Job does not deny the principle of retribution, but he wants to be shown the sins that have brought this calamity upon him. He is seeking a revelation from God since he is the one who judges his actions. No insight is given at this time, but the possibility is made clear.

Job 42:5. Job responded to God's self-disclosure. Something happened to Job during the encounter with God, as a result of his suffering, that helped him to know God in a deeper, more intimate way. It is interesting to note that Job was already aware of God's power and majesty. Possibly this old information was combined in such a manner as to stimulate the new understanding.

Psalms 22:1-31. This poet employs excellent images to convey his suffering and capture by his enemies (v.12f). The first section (1-21) is a lament, a recollection of all the mental anguish and physical pain that the psalmist experienced. Verses 22-31 form a hymn of thanksgiving for God's saving action that redeemed him from this tribulation. These two parts are connected by a basic theme which is the

search and discovery of God. "A full understanding of the Psalm can be achieved only if we consider the psalmist's mental anguish in the light of the religious doubts which torment the psalmist's soul; making the most desperate efforts he strives for an assurance from his God and for communion with him."⁶⁸ A person's fellowship and sense of dependence on God is deepened through suffering.

Psalms 28:1-9. This is similar to Ps. 22 in that it is divided into a lament (vv. 1-5) and thanksgiving (vv. 6-8). The poet is in fear of suffering the impending punishment that will be given to the wicked. There is no mention of the psalmist actually suffering. Out of this cry of distress for fair and just treatment, the poet discovers God's true intention. The Lord has given this person some kind of reassurance that all will go well with him (motivation for the thanksgiving). There is an affirmation of the strength of God's fellowship during times of crisis. It is uncertain what exactly was revealed to the psalmist so that this psalm fits on the periphery of this perspective.

Psalms 73:16-17. Out of the author's suffering and frustration with the apparent lack of action by God, finally comes a vision of the future of the wicked. It may be

⁶⁸Weiser, p. 220. Rad, Old Testament Theology, I, 402, also suggests Psalms 66:10, 11, 118:18, 119:67, 71.

safely assumed that this insight brings him closer to God and helps him understand, in part, His mysterious ways.

Matthew 25:31-46. Jesus is teaching his disciples on the Mount of Olives. This pericope suggests that God is to be seen and encountered in the lives of those who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, in prison. Out of the suffering of these kinds of people, the disciples are to gain a new understanding of God. This understanding does not fit conventionally into this perspective in that it speaks of revelation gained from involvement with those who suffer (and not from removed observation). It is not clear whether those who suffer are given a better knowledge of God.

Romans 5:3-5. Clinard suggests "that this may be interpreted as revelational in the sense of the insistence on a new hope and confidence in God attendant on suffering."⁶⁹ If, indeed, as I believe, trouble (or pressure) can produce the ability to actively overcome difficulties, and it in turn produces sterling character which produces hope, not in an illusion, but in a real insight into God's love, then I believe this pericope may be classified as revelational.

Romans 8:18. Through the evil, calamity, misfortune, and affliction of this present situation, Paul felt

⁶⁹Clinard, p. 22.

that God's glory would far outweigh their effect. It does not mention that the glory is revealed through suffering; only that the sufferings are not comparable to the great revelation of God's nature that will occur in the future.

II Corinthians 1:8-11. Paul speaks of the mental anguish that he and his companions experienced while on their Asian missionary travels. So great was their despair and despondency that they felt they were going to die. Out of this suffering they realized that this situation only provided a greater opportunity to rely upon God. Revelation of an indirect nature occurred when they became aware of their ability to trust God.

Hebrews 2:10. In a previous category, I disagreed with another author's interpretation of this passage. I suggested that it might fit more appropriately here in this perspective. My reason is centered around the thought that Jesus was the one, through his suffering, who showed us the way to God. It was via his pain and anguish that we came to understand God's revelation in his life. We learned about God by watching or hearing of Jesus' trials and tribulations. Since it was through observation of another, it would fit on the periphery of this perspective.

I Peter 4:13, 14. The author makes a connection between the believer's suffering and Christ's suffering.

He speaks of a glory that will be revealed in the future because of that shared experience. Neither Jesus' pain nor the glory that is to be revealed are elaborated. But we can infer that the insight into God's perfection will occur because of the endured suffering.

Revelation 1:9ff. John's vision of the living Christ came in the midst of tribulation, the details of which are unknown.

Conclusion. Suffering may provide the opportunity for a better understanding of God, his people, and the world. Insights into the divine-human relationship are possible through the endurance of physical pain and mental anguish. Revelations through this process may also deal with human relationship and the nature of the world. "Suffering is often a trust from God; it may be his best gift. It may become the doorway to the understanding of life and our real sense of purpose in the world."⁷⁰ A new understanding of God and his being is possible by observation of those who suffer (like Jesus) and by involvement with the afflicted ones. "These 'least ones' (Matt. 25) were according to him, the 'written, living human documents of flesh and blood' where God was most certainly making himself known."⁷¹

⁷⁰Francisco, p. 41.

⁷¹Oates, p. 20.

Sacrificial and Redemptive

It is common for those who suffer to feel that their endurance somehow contributes to the betterment of a larger situation. Often people look at their afflictions as a sacrifice which they offer to make the world a better place to live. At times one person may suffer mental torture and physical abuse so that his family or friends might be free from suffering. When trials and tribulations are endured for a greater value or cause, they are sacrificial. Suffering is redemptive when it frees another person from suffering or assists in turning them back to God.

As we have seen, suffering can be constructive or destructive. When it is destructive, it is evil. A person can rarely achieve a good end through evil means. But God is able to do just that which man cannot do. In his mysterious way, He can utilize a person's sins and sufferings for his saving acts of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This fifth perspective identifies the sacrificial and redemptive nature of suffering. This biblical view suggests that physical evil may be redemptive as it is suffered for another person. It may be redemptive for the one who suffers in the sense that God can achieve his success in spite of and even through suffering. In addition, though separate, there is a New Testament theme "that is based on a limited dualism which attributes suffering to

just reward and punishment. The second level of suffering was for the pagan nations to see her witness before the Lord. Not only had Israel suffered retributively, but her endurance produced an effect that was to redeem the nation by its sacrifice of self as a nation. Israel bore the burden of suffering (second level) that properly belonged to the pagan countries (their first level). When these foreign nations became aware of this fact, then they would turn to Yahweh as the one and only true God.

It is not difficult to understand that Israel was punished for her mistakes. But God laid on her the punishment that was fitting for those foreign nations. If she faithfully endured the experience, it would have both a sacrificial and redemptive effect. "The sufferings of Israel in exile are interpreted as a guilt-offering for the nations of the world, which will not only move them to repentance, but also make for them a sacrificial means of approach to God."⁷⁴

In this exilic period, the prophets emphasized the importance of repentance, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and suffering as substitutes for material sacrifices. Atonement was through sacrifice and it was costly to the believer. "Most efficacious seemed to be the atoning power of suffering experienced by the righteous during the exile."⁷⁵

⁷⁴Robinson, p. 44.

⁷⁵Owen Brandon, "Atonement through Suffering," Church Quarterly Review, CLXIII (July 5, 1962), 282.

the power of the devil, but sees God as 'redeeming' the evil in his victory over the satanic power. The victory comes to the sufferer as God takes that for which he is not responsible and makes it work for his own purpose."⁷²

Job 42:10ff. The epilogue of Job suggests that he made his suffering redemptive by accepting it patiently, faithfully, and prayerfully on behalf of his poor, uninformed friends. The passage reveals that in a materialistic sense, he redeemed himself, since his fortunes were restored. "In Job, that suggestion of suffering being made redemptive is almost accidental, and it is certainly crudely expressed."⁷³

Isaiah 40-55. As we have seen in the previous discussion of Hosea and Jeremiah, the nation of Israel had abandoned her faith in Yahweh. She was without a blessing, without a God. Israel was destroyed as a nation as a result of her rejection of God and her people were exiled into a foreign land.

Then an unknown prophet (Deutero-Isaiah) arose to call Israel to repentance and new obedience to God. He understood that Israel had received double for her sins of rejection (40:2). The first level of suffering was her

⁷²Clinard, p. 23.

⁷³Bowker, pp. 19, 20.

During the course of this study, it became evident that there was some debate as to whether the suffering servant mentioned in Isaiah was the nation as a whole, the remnant, or a single person. After some study (C Westerman, Interpreter's Bible, Walter Eichrodt, and G. Von Rad), I must admit that the question of identity is still unresolved for me. The possibility of using each of these three understandings where it seemed appropriate by way of wording and context would be the most pragmatic method for our study. "Not a few of the questions which are of importance for their understanding can no longer be answered or at least, the expositor ought to allow that, in places, more than one answer is possible."⁷⁶

The four servants poems are 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. It is within these four songs that the concept of the suffering servant emerges. This is probably one of the high-water marks of Old Testament theology, and it has certainly had its effect on New Testament theology and Jesus' self-understanding. The interpretation of human suffering as a vicarious offering to God begins in Deutero-Isaiah.

Isaiah 42:1-4. God is speaking and introducing in courtly fashion his chosen servant. He declares his task

⁷⁶Rad, Old Testament Theology, II, 251.

(to bring forth justice and righteousness as truth) but not his identity or nature. The unclear or veiled language leaves the question of identity and nature open for the hearers to interpret. The servant, unlike the prophet, is given public recognition and accreditation. He is given a promise which presumes that he will suffer (v. 4). This theme is expanded to a greater degree in the other three poems.

Isaiah 49:1-6. The servant is speaking to the foreign nations as captured in the image "you coastlands" "you peoples from afar." The speaker tells of his call, appointment and training. He apparently has been despondent over the failure of his present work (v. 4) when God revealed a new project to and for him (vv. 5, 6) which is to declare Yahweh's salvation to the ends of the earth. The theme of God's appointment of the servant and his task to the Gentiles is repeated as it was in 42:1-4. It is to be noted that the servant has been given the power of the spoken word "like a sharp sword and polished arrow." These weapons are of an offensive nature as well as defensive. This could imply hostile encounters. The speaker tells the listeners that he was called by God to be his servant (v. 3) the "ebed". Only here is the ebed called Israel. For further discussion see resources listed above. A single person seems to be speaking when the passage reflects the

process of birth and his failure to bring the nation back into the faith. Whether it was one or many, the servant's office is changed to "include the Gentile world."⁷⁷ The servant's earlier failures were vindicated because God chose him for the new and greater task. There is no strong mention of suffering.

Isaiah 50:4-9. This is like a few of the psalms of confidence that we discussed earlier. Great suffering is recounted, but the speaker's final hope and assurance is with God. This is the combination of lament and thanksgiving. The servant is the speaker. It is unclear to whom he is speaking; most probably the foreign nations or Israel. His mention of the weary (v. 4) would tip the scales in favor of the many as opposed to one. The servant is not called the ebed but is the limmud which refers to a disciple or student. He must learn each morning by being taught what he must later pass on or proclaim. The servant is a disciple, but he is more.

The courageous disciple endured great suffering and physical abuse. He was whipped and had his beard pulled out. There is mental anguish when he is shamed and spat upon. He accepts this suffering for the sake of the task. "Some radical change has come about, and a new factor

⁷⁷Westermann, pp. 211-12.

entered into God's dealings with his chosen people - the lament of the mediator who is attacked and defamed because of his tasks here develops, for the first time, into assent to and acceptance of this suffering."⁷⁸

In spite of the mental and physical suffering, the disciple/servant did not rebel against receiving the word nor did he shrink from the task of proclaiming it. The disciple/servant interpreted the suffering as having purpose and therefore it was justified. By accepting this, he concedes that God (in the orthodox view) must be on the side of his oppressors.

But immediately in the next verse (7) this is contradicted. He claims that God helps him by not allowing him to be confounded or put to shame. This is his "conviction that God himself wills his servant's suffering and its acceptance."⁷⁹ It is only complete acceptance that makes him able to endure these hardships "with a face hard as flint."

Legal language is employed in v. 8 similar to that of Hosea 4:4ff. This is an invitation or challenge to engage his opponents in court. Those who mistreated him are his opponents - possibly meaning the foreign nations. The speaker is confident that his case is strong; that God will vindicate him through the legal proceedings. It might be

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 230.

⁷⁹Ibid.

thought of as an appeal since he admitted his guilt and defeat by accepting the punishment. It would have been a joke for the oppressors to go to court. The appeal for retrial is left unanswered.

Isaiah 52:13-52:12. God is the first and last speaker (52:13-15 and 53:11b, 12). From the context and information of the three other poems, it appears that the foreign nations are the other speakers (53:1-11a); this section of scripture is made as an observation and the servant is presented in the third person.

God declares the success of his servant's work and because of this he will prosper and be exalted. His suffering was a shock to those who encountered him, as his body bore the marks of pain, shame, and humiliation. In the last part, God explains that His servant is to bring about righteousness for many people as well as bear their sins. The servant becomes an intercessor for the people by giving up his life and enduring the physical and mental suffering.

The center portion of scripture speaks about the feelings that the observers had for the obscure and wounded servant. It stands as a confession of their salvation by what happened through and to the servant (v. 4). No one noticed this chosen one developing because he had no outstanding features and no glowing family heritage. In fact,

he was an outcast, one who was physically abused and rejected from the social structure. The people reacted as if he had leprosy. Throughout his life, from birth to death, he was mistreated. And even worse, after his death, he was buried in a separate place with the evildoers, although he had done nothing to deserve it.

Finally, the observers recognized that he had carried the punishment that they deserved on his body. They had seen him only in light of the orthodox retributive view - wounded by God as a punishment. Clearly they became aware that it was for their mistakes, their shortcomings, their failures, their sins, that he suffered. The Lord is given credit (or blame) for laying these things on him (vv. 6, 10). He didn't choose them, but he did accept and silently endure them. He bore their sins to the end - to death.

The Lord is seen by the observers in vv. 10 and 11 as redeeming the servant's work and giving him his due and just rewards. He shall see his children and grandchildren, and his life will be restored and prolonged. God's will was accomplished through his noble efforts. The power of God was visible and manifested in his weakness. And the observers are converted through his actions.

The most important essential characteristic of the ebed Yahweh in these texts is that his vicarious representation is accomplished in suffering. The ebed is the suffering servant of God. Through suffering he takes the place of the many who should suffer instead of him.

A second essential characteristic of the ebed Yahweh is that his representative work re-establishes the covenant which God had made with his people.⁸⁰

When Israel is understood as the suffering servant, it is easy to envision the new exodus of vindication from Babylon back to Jerusalem. Their suffering had redeemed both themselves and the other nations. "They would see a people, whom they had believed to be completely humiliated and despised, returning in triumph across the desert from Babylon to Zion and as the Exodus from Egypt had vindicated Yahweh . . . in the eyes of his own people, so the new exodus would vindicate him in the eyes of the whole world."⁸¹

Here is one of the supreme contributions that Israel made to the human understanding of suffering. Suffering can be endured for a cause or greater value as in a sacrifice or it can be redemptive in that it sets people free from their past and brings them back to God.

Mark 1:1-11. It is proposed that Jesus first became aware of his special role as the ebed Yahweh when he was baptized. The key to this problem is God's voice declaring that "Thou art my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." It is a quotation from Is. 42:1. Cullman sees

⁸⁰Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 55.

⁸¹Bowker, p. 21.

a deliberate connection between these words which are used to address the ebed Yahweh in Isaiah and the fact that they introduce Jesus on his earthly ministry.⁸²

Mark 8:34, 35. Jesus speaks to a large crowd who has gathered with the disciples. He states the conditions for being a follower. One must deny self and accept the cross as well as forfeit one's life for Jesus and the gospel's sake. The cross points vividly and directly to death. It is only in the light of Jesus' example that it becomes a redemptive and sacrificial tool instead of a horrible instrument of punishment.

Mark 10:34-45. The key idea focuses on Jesus' comment to the disciples that even the Lord of life came not to be master over all but rather servant. He came to give his life away as a ransom for the lives of many people. The concept of servant does not include suffering and death as does that of ransom. Servant here means to minister and "to be devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests."⁸³ This self-disregard may or may not involve suffering.

John 1:29. John the Baptist sees Jesus and proclaims that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins

⁸²Cullmann, p. 66.

⁸³Thayer, p. 158.

of the world. There is much discussion regarding the proper understanding of this statement. R. E. Brown raises this point: Could the concept of the Suffering Servant be known to both John the Baptist and John the writer? He argues convincingly that John the Baptist saw no one who was able to take away the sins of the world. John the Baptist saw total destruction of the wicked. There is no clear evidence that the Suffering Servant image had been isolated and emphasized as an eschatological figure or that the Messiah had been identified with the Suffering Servant. It is a Mexican stand-off. "Thus while we cannot deny that it is possible that John the Baptist thought of Jesus as the Suffering Servant, there is no real proof he did."⁸⁴

It is more conceivable that John the writer made such a connection. Is. 53:7 was applied to Jesus in Acts 8:32 and so the comparison was known to Christians (also Matt. 8:17; Hebrews 9:28). Clement of Rome applied Is. 53 to Jesus at the end of the first century. All the songs that refer to the Suffering Servant are found in the second part of Isaiah. This section was associated in part in the New Testament with John the Baptist, "the voice crying out in the desert" is from Is. 40:3. Jesus is described as the Suffering Servant in John 12:38 (Is. 53:1).

⁸⁴ Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John (New York: Doubleday, 1966), I, 60.

Brown⁸⁵ summarizes three different interpretations: 1) the Lamb as the apocalyptic lamb; 2) the Lamb as Suffering Servant; 3) the Lamb as the paschal Lamb. He sees no problem in maintaining that John the writer knew and applied both the Suffering Servant and paschal lamb images. "With such good arguments (see his discussion) for the views that the evangelist intended the Lamb of God to refer to the Suffering Servant and to the paschal lamb, we see no serious difficulty in maintaining that John intended both references. Both fit into John's Christology and are well attested in first century Christianity."⁸⁶

Cullman has drawn together these concepts in an excellent summary statement which helps to fit them into this category.

It does seem at first glance that the paschal lamb denotes a different idea, and there is in fact at least a subtle difference. For the Jews the purpose of sacrificing the paschal lamb is to achieve atonement for the sins of the people (Ex. 12). The Jewish idea of sacrifice brought to God lies in the background here. The ebed Yahweh concept also includes the idea of a sacrifice, but the idea of a voluntary representation dominates this concept. The paschal lamb is by nature purely passive; it takes away sins by its being passively offered up. The ebed Yahweh, on the other hand, voluntarily takes the sins of others upon himself and only in this active manner takes them away. We are, therefore, concerned with very closely related concepts, each of which emphasizes a particular aspect of the atoning death. We could say that the concept of the lamb emphasizes more strongly the goal while the concept of the ebed Yahweh emphasizes the means (voluntary vicarious suffering) by which the goal is reached.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Ibid., I., 58-63.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 63.

⁸⁷Cullmann, pp. 70-2.

John 10:11-18. Jesus is addressing his followers teaching them that he is the normative or model shepherd. The model shepherd risks his life to the point of death for the sheep. One of the main thrusts is the fact that Jesus saw himself suffering on behalf of his followers. Jesus speaks of dying to protect his sheep but says nothing about redeeming them. However, we must be aware that "it is not impossible that Jesus spoke more vaguely of risking one's life for the sheep and that in the light of his death his remarks were reinterpreted in terms of deliberately laying down his life for the sheep."⁸⁸

John 15:13. Jesus declares that the supreme example of love is demonstrated by a person who would die on behalf of his friends. A general sense of sacrifice is felt in this passage even though specifics have not been individualized. The sense of sacrifice is picked up in the preposition "for his". It is the same preposition that is used in the eucharistic formulas. "The same preposition, hyper, occurs in the eucharistic formulas for the blood of the covenant which is shed 'for many' (Mk. 14:24) or 'for you' (Lk. 22:20)."⁸⁹ Suffering, even to death, may be sacrificial if it is endured on behalf of another person.

Acts 26:18. Clinard⁹⁰ suggests that this passage

⁸⁸Brown, I., 398.

⁹⁰Clinard, p. 23.

⁸⁹Ibid., I., 664.

supports the view that suffering is redemptive because God redeems the evil in his victory over satanic powers. This view assumes a limited dualism which attributes pain and suffering to the power of the devil. In Jesus' miracles of healing, one can find evidence that disease was considered evil and an obstacle to God's will. The same is true of the disciples' commission to engage in healing acts. Paul emphasizes this type of thinking in Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:12-14, 2:15; Eph. 2:2.

Romans 3:21-26. A much-debated passage reveals that Jesus suffered as an expiation for our sin thereby redeeming us. Expiation means that it was an offering given as a part of the atonement practice. His suffering was a sacrifice that brought us back into relationship with God.

Romans 5:6-11. Paul writes to the Roman Church regarding his conviction that Jesus' death was definitely an expiatory or vicarious sacrifice. It was his death that opened the way to salvation for all sinners. Christ's blood and our faith (5:1) justify us before God.

Romans 8:31-38. The apostle emphasizes God's great love for us. His Son died and became our intercessor. This speaks indirectly about Christ's suffering on our behalf. More plainly, it points to the belief that no suffering or distress, real or projected, can separate a person from

the love that was revealed in the Cross.

I Corinthians 5:6-8. Paul addresses the Corinthian Christian community regarding their poor discipline of wayward believers. In the midst of the yeast illustration, by way of passing, he relates Christ with the paschal lamb. Before the feast of the unleavened bread, the paschal lamb was slain. This sacrifice had nothing to do with the forgiveness of sin.⁹¹ Paul may have had redemption in mind when he connected Christ with the sacrificial lamb, but it is unclear in this passage.

I Corinthians 15:3. Paul received a new tradition when he became a Christian. That tradition dealt with the redeeming and saving activity of God in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is clearly stated that Jesus suffered the pains of death to save us from our sins.

II Corinthians 1:3-7. Paul speaks to the Corinthians not about their in-group conflicts but rather about the ridicule and mistreatment that they have experienced as followers of Christ. Paul believes that the divine purpose in his suffering and comfort is to enable him to bring more sympathetic support and encouragement to those distressed ones in Corinth. Paul's suffering, properly received and

⁹¹Clarence Tucker Craig, "I Corinthians: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953), X, 65.

understood, becomes an avenue of blessing for others. So indirectly he sees that he is suffering for their sakes as well as for Christ's. "In every trial and comfort he sees not merely a personal matter, but something which he can endure for the benefit of his converts or something which blesses him in order that he may the better serve them."⁹²

Galatians 3:10-14. Christ redeemed us by hanging on a tree. Hanging on a tree usually occurred after death as a public display. Here Paul is referring to the crucifixion not the usual after treatment.⁹³ The Greek word which is translated redeemed means brought out from or delivered at the expense of one's self. It is clear that Christ suffered to set us free.

Philippians 2:5-11. This early hymn of the Church reflects Christ's obedience to humble himself even to the point of death. It is within reason to assume that the cross was understood in a double meaning - both in the penal and redemptive sense. The redemptive nature is implied in the exaltation of Jesus. "For Jesus the work of atonement involved the whole process of *κένωσις*, which means at least self-abnegation, limitation, humiliation, obedience, suffering and death."⁹⁴

⁹²Floyd V. Filson, "II Corinthians: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953) X, 282.

⁹³R. T. Stamm, "Galatians: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953) X, 509.

⁹⁴Brandon, p. 283.

Colossians 1:24-29. These afflictions mentioned by Paul are not redemptive. But they are sacrificial in that Paul endured them on behalf of the Church as he fulfilled his leadership role. His difficulties were the direct result of his divine office.

Colossians 2:13-15. This is an inference in v. 14 regarding the believer's bond being canceled by the death of Christ on the cross. Setting people free through suffering is implied.

II Timothy 2:8-10. Here the key emphasis is found in v. 10 where Paul says that he endures everything for the sake of the greater good - salvation of other people. Suffering, even being in jail, has a purpose and meaning in the process of declaring God's saving activity. Paul and other ministers were a part of God's plan of salvation via their suffering. "The emphasis here is on those who are yet to be saved as the direct result of endurance of suffering on the part of Christ's ministers."⁹⁵

Hebrews 2:9, 10. It is implied here that Jesus died for everyone to redeem them from their sin and to lead them to God.

Hebrews, 9:15, 23-28. The first verse captures the theme of a mediator who stands between God and his people.

⁹⁵Gealy, p. 484.

It may be assumed that the death mentioned refers to the mediator. The death has a redemptive quality in that it makes the person the mediator. The second portion of scripture seeks to point out that Christ was the mediator who appeared before God on our behalf. His sacrificial death was sufficient to carry away sin. Christ's suffering and his ability to bear sin was a once for all action.

Hebrews 13:7-16. The key thought is in v. 12 which identifies Jesus as the one who suffered to sanctify the people outside the gate. The author is associating the sacrificial animals and the body of Jesus with their common importance for real worship. Jesus' death sanctified the people; that is, his death purified them or set them free from sin.

I Peter 1:18-20. The author reminds his audience that he was redeemed from his wasteful ways by the sacrifice of Christ's death. It is here that Christ is regarded as the paschal lamb who is sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins according to the Jewish concept. Atonement was achieved by the passive action of Jesus dying.

2:18-24. The author now mentions that Jesus suffered for his audience and that he bore the sins of many on the cross. It was through his suffering that the believers were set free from disease.

3:18. This passage is similar in thought to Hebrews 9 above, in that it emphasizes the once-for-all nature of Christ's redemptive death as well as the allusion to his ability to be mediator. Clearly Christ's death is atoning for our sins, vicariously for us and mediatorialy for our relationship with God.

4:1-6. The main theme is that suffering which is humbly borne has moral value in that it purifies from sin. Even when the evildoers abuse the believer, he is to maintain the same stance as Jesus did - to patiently endure it. This pericope speaks of sacrifice and redemption through suffering which enables another to be weaned from sin.

5:8-11. The limited dualism of that period of history is clearly seen in the implication that God will overcome evil to restore and strengthen the believer. It is redemptive in that God will not let that suffering be lost but will redeem it in his victory over the devil.

Revelation 5:6-10. The apolyptic lamb which is sacrificed ransoms men for God. Christ's death was a payment to set men free. The difficult question is "Who was paid?"

Conclusion. Atonement is achieved through suffering. People are brought closer to God and in turn are drawn closer to each other because of some suffering. The

suffering of Jesus opened the doors between these groups as never before. His death was costly for God and for his followers, since it established a pattern of behavior for them. "We must be prepared to accept suffering as part of the process of our own redemption."⁹⁶

Throughout the Bible there is a traceable theme regarding the efficacy and redeeming power of suffering love as revealed in God's nature. Such terms as sacrifice, ransom, propitiation and expiation highlight this theme. Pain and abuse were endured to lead others into a saving knowledge of God.

Within the New Testament, many writers interpreted Jesus' suffering as sacrificial and redemptive, thereby opening the way to God in a most unique fashion. Whether Jesus understood and accepted this interpretation is not clear.

It is true of course that Jesus did not place his own person, especially his suffering and death, so centrally in his preaching of the Kingdom of God as the Apostle Paul later did in his proclamation. But that is because Jesus was conscious during his earthly life of being called first of all to live, not to teach, the work of atonement. Thus he did not only teach the Father's forgiveness of sins; in healing the sick he actually forgave sins.⁹⁷

Illusory or Transitory

This view is an undercurrent of many psalms. It

⁹⁶Brandon, p. 282.

⁹⁷Cullmann, p. 61.

carries with it the belief that suffering is unreal when one realizes that a good God is in control. Suffering is on the way to being made good by God. Therefore it is illusory. The other element in this perspective is that pain and mental torment are of a passing nature. These things are temporary. They will last only for a moment. Cleary has suggested that over against God's promise of his gift of salvation, all our suffering has an imposed time limit beyond which lies a timeless period of divine blessing.⁹⁸

Job 11:16. Zophar the Naamathite is speaking to Job regarding his belief that misery will pass like water under a bridge. He will remember the pain and anguish as water gone by. However, this can occur only if he confesses his guilt and seeks to remove it (vv. 13, 14).

Psalms 4:1-8. The poet contends with his friends who are disenchanted and disillusioned with their distressing circumstances. The specifics of their afflictions are not mentioned. But the poet seems to be saying that God has once delivered him (v. 1) and on that experience he will base his faith that the present suffering will only be momentary (implied). The central themes are the deliverance from physical affliction and the revelation of God.

⁹⁸Cleary, p. 1.

Here, too, there is the emphasis that the believer must put himself in right relationship with God (vv, 4, 5) before suffering takes on a transitory nature.

Psalms 11:1-7. The psalmist and his companions are under some kind of duress. His friends suggest that he escape and flee to another area. He refuses because he has faith in God as his true shelter. The thought behind v. 6 is that the wicked will be destroyed by God. This mental anguish and threat of physical abuse is just a brief experience. This passage may fit more clearly in the retribution or probationary sections. There is a sense of transitoriness in a good many of the passages in these two categories. While the suffering is not an illusion, it is only for a while.

Psalms 23:1-6. The key is v. 4 where the poet remembers his time of trouble and distress. Even in the midst of tribulation, this person feels God's presence and therefore a hope and assurance that these evils will pass.

Psalms 27:1-6. It is very similar to Ps. 23 in form and content. However, this psalm is set in the future. When the poet encounters the wicked and is physically and mentally abused, then he will cling to his faith in God. To speak of the future with such confidence precludes past perilous experiences and God's delivering presence.

Possibly it is stretching matters, but in v. 5 the poet speaks singularly of his day of trouble as if it will come and go.

Psalms 30:4, 5. These verses allude in passing to the orthodox belief that God's righteous anger manifested itself in the suffering of the guilty but that it is only for a moment. The crying that results from pain is only for the night. Since its final purpose is to educate, it also fits into the second perspective.

Psalms 34:18-22. The psalmist reverts back to his own experience and reveals that he does not believe in cheap retribution. For him, life involves suffering, but it is only the faithful who are not crushed by their afflictions. It is implied that the sufferings are real but transitory. The Lord guarantees that the pain will not be permanent.

Psalms 37:1,2,12,13,32-36. The righteous have faith that God will not abandon them to evildoers (i.e., suffering). "The aim of the poet is to exhort the godly to cling to their trust in God and to their obedience to Him in the face of the temptations which come about as the result of the existence and behavior of the wicked: be it anger, envy, poverty, affliction, fear or doubts about

God's actions and his righteousness."⁹⁹ The exhortation (v.34) to wait patiently for the Lord points to the belief that the difficult circumstances will shortly be changed. The suffering, in other words, will not last.

Psalms 62:1-12. The psalmist has been forsaken by his close associates or friends. He sees himself like a leaning wall or fence that is in danger of falling. Additional pain is generated because these associates outwardly continue their friendship and inwardly lie and curse him. The poet finds his help and strength only in God. He may have tried other unsuccessful avenues to solve his problem. Evildoers are like a breath and a delusion (v. 9). They will quickly pass away. This song is similar to Psalms 42 and 43 in that they all combine despair and trust. The other two are less convincing about their hope in God as compared to our present poem.

The idea of suffering, affliction or tribulation as momentary or transitory is also stated, implied or inferred in portions of the following Psalms: 6, 13, 22, 28, 30, 31, 41, 54, 55, 56, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69, 71, 86, 94, 102, 120 and 130 (see Weiser p. 70). The discovery of this list came late in my research. I was unable to incorporate it into this writing.

⁹⁹Weiser, p. 315.

Isaiah 29:5-8. This passage refers to the sudden attack on Jerusalem which resulted in much suffering (i.e., it will become like an altar for sacrifice - blood flowing everywhere). Equally as sudden will be the passing of this destruction which is initiated by the Assyrians. The Assyrians will be disillusioned like a hungry and thirsty man who dreams that he is getting his fill only to be awakened to the reality that he is starving. The implication, among other things, is that the suffering will not last for Jerusalem.

Romans 8:18. By way of contrast, Paul says we cannot imagine how great our glory will be, but certainly it will outweigh any suffering that we experience. Hence these sufferings have an end. It may be stretching things a bit to say that these afflictions are temporary in a human sense, but from God's viewpoint these are momentary. The idea of patiently enduring tribulation because it has an end is also implied in Romans 12:12 and I Corinthians 13:7.

II Corinthians 4:19. The suffering of the present is very brief, particularly since it is preparing believers for an unmeasureable glory. Affliction is real and sometimes appears overwhelming (v. 16), but it only is for a moment. It soon has an end.

I Peter 1:6. The author states a disciplinary and

evidential view of suffering. But couched in it is the sidelight that these trials are but for a little while; likewise with I Peter 5:10.

Conclusion. Suffering may be understood as only lasting for a moment and therefore is not to be regarded as real. The biblical witness recognizes this possibility but is more inclined to say that suffering is real and yet it will not last. In some passages this understanding could be achieved only after the sufferer committed his life or reaffirmed his trust in God. A variation emerged in the belief that suffering was transitory from God's viewpoint but not from man's. In addition, there was the peripheral interpretation that suffering was transitory in that God was ready to apply his retribution to the wicked who caused the suffering.

Meaningless

The seventh perspective on suffering is the shortest. It expresses the belief that suffering is meaningless. It cannot be understood at all, not even as a mystery because the facts are so contradictory and confusing. Most writers (Robinson, Clinard and Ferguson) do not mention this category. Sanders identifies it as does Cleary, but neither offers substantial scriptural support. Cleary's brief comment is that both Job and Ecclesiastes conclude

that afflictions are so mysterious that they are ultimately meaningless to mere mortals.

Job 24:1-25. Despite its textual and linguistic difficulties, this passage yields one verse that could be used to support this category. God does not hear the groans and cries of the wounded (v. 12). He pays no attention to their prayers. It is difficult to say anything about this passage, even the fact that in total despair the author finds no meaning behind all of the suffering that surrounds him, because of the textual uncertainty.

Job 29:1-31:37. Here is an overview of Job's moral and ethical life. He remembers the happier experiences of his early life (29:1-25); from the blessings of God's providential presence and care to the prestige of his integrity. Then he speaks of the suffering of the present situation (30:1-31); of the irreverence and hostility of people, the cruelty of God and the misery of being abandoned. He swears to an oath of innocence (31:1-37); thus claiming his inward purity and the curses that shall come upon him if he has lied. A challenge to God to make sense out of this situation is the climax. Job cannot understand the contradiction that he has seen and experienced in his own life. He awaits God's response to justify the things that have happened within his holy realm. The upshot is that he cannot make sense out of his suffering, particularly along

traditional lines of interpretation.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-14. The preacher has reflected upon the processes of nature and observed human activity, both good and bad. It all seems to be without purpose. Implied, then, is that suffering, like the rest of life, is meaningless. His comment is not made in anger or despair, but in acceptance. If anything is true, life must be taken as it is.

Ecclesiastes 2:12-17. The author considers the fate of the wise man and the fool. He notes that the fool suffers more than the wise man because of his ignorance. But this is no real gain for the wise man since the distinction between the two is temporary and death overcomes them both. The preacher hates this existence with its lack of discernment and discrimination. Things happen regardless of human worth or value. There is a lack of justice in the world when one works hard to build an empire, but dies, and another, who has not worked, inherits it. It is meaningless and frustrating. The preacher despairs.

Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3. The theme of frustration and meaninglessness is carried over into the view of death. Both man and animals face the same ultimate outcome. There is no after life to balance things. All is dirt. People must resign themselves to endure this life stoically, find-

ing enjoyment where they can. There is no comfort, no relief, for the dead or the living. Those who are in a good state are those who have not been born.

Ecclesiastes 6:1-6. The preacher affirms that God has predestined every person's future, evidenced in such things are wealth, possessions and honor. If God predestines a person's existence, there is nothing that one can do. For this Godly action has removed all value and meaning from life. "For determinism is the negation of worth and man's life - his vain life - is empty of value."¹⁰⁰ Therefore life and any experience therein, like suffering, is meaningless; 8:14 and 9:1-2 carry the same sense of vanity.

Conclusion. There are only a few writers who have examined the world and found that its contradictory ways are without meaning.

Mysterious

One of the most frequently mentioned interpretations of suffering is that it is mysterious. God's thoughts and actions are not ours and we are not in a position to understand or judge Him. To put it in a syllogism may be

¹⁰⁰G. G. Atkins, "Ecclesiastes: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible (1953), V, 61.

helpful: God is a perfect reality. A perfect reality is a mystery (a mystery by definition is inexplicable). Therefore, God and his ways are inexplicable. One author believes that this is not a solution to our problem, but it is a suggestion that no solution is possible because man is too small a fragment of the universe to discern the total design.¹⁰¹

Often the biblical writers confess their lack of understanding and their continued faith in God in spite of conflicting evidence. The mystery of suffering perspective assumes four basic principles. First, God is in sovereign control of man and history and he has a purpose for both. Second, it is absolutely impossible to judge this purpose fully in every circumstance. Third, a theoretical solution to suffering should be practical and found in a faith which perseveres in spite of circumstances.¹⁰²

Genesis 50:20. Joseph is speaking to his repentant brothers. He reveals that their evil acts, though not willed or approved by God, were used by him to bring about a good result. God included his brothers' wrongdoing in his saving activity.

The statement about the brothers' evil plans and God's good plans now opens up the inmost mystery of the Joseph story.... Even where no man could imagine it,

¹⁰¹Bowker, p. 22.

¹⁰²Clinard, p. 24; I have paraphrased his four truths.

God had all the strings in his hand (432). This rule of God for the salvation of men continuously permeates all realms of life and includes even man's evil by making the plans of the heart serve divine purposes, without hindering them or excusing them.¹⁰³

Job 38:1-42:6. God finally breaks his silence and speaks to Job. He does not answer directly any of Job's questions or challenges. Through a series of rhetorical questions, God opens the doors to part of his majesty, thus challenging Job's finitude. From the start of creation to the unusual characteristics of animals, God tells him that he cannot comprehend His ways. Job cannot judge the world from man's point of view. "In essence, the answer suggested is that the individual problem must be set in the far greater context of creation as a whole. The individual is such a tiny part of the whole pattern that he cannot possibly comprehend the total design."¹⁰⁴ Another author continues the thought:

The creatures glorified by the poet are not chosen at random. For all their variety, they have one element in common: they are not under the sway of man, nor are they intended for his use. The implication is clear: the universe and its creator cannot be judged solely from the vantage-point of man, and surely not from the limited perspective of one human being.¹⁰⁵

That God's ways are mysterious to his people is one interpretation of the passage. Another view considers that Job acquired strength and vindication when God broke his

¹⁰³Rad, Genesis, pp. 432 and 438.

¹⁰⁴Bowker, p. 21. ¹⁰⁵Gordis, p. 49.

silence. Just by speaking, God recognized that Job existed and no longer ignored him. Sin separates man from God. If suffering is the result of sin, part of its effects are felt in a sense of alienation from God. Job is acutely aware of this estrangement. The re-establishment of their relationship is a sign of vindication for Job. Robert Gordis, who offers this interpretation, also suggests that it is not only that God speaks but it is what he says that is important for the sufferer. By way of the usual Hebrew useage of hint, implication and connotation, God says that nature is more than a mystery, it is a miracle. "Just as there is order and harmony in the natural world, though imperfectly grasped by man, so there is order and meaning in the moral sphere, though often incomprehensible to man."¹⁰⁶

Psalm 31:1-24. The poet speaks of a man who has suffered a long illness, personal abuse by his enemies, rejection from his friends and who seeks God's help in the face of death. By inference, he is calling to a God who is hidden (1-13). He must trust in the invisible hand that does not always reveal itself. "Comfort and strength were granted to him because of his trustful surrender to God's hidden goodness."¹⁰⁷

Psalm 73:1-28. This psalm has at its roots the

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 62-63.

¹⁰⁷Weiser, p. 276.

realization that the problem of suffering is really "only the occasion for religion's comprehensive inquiry into the nature and value of man's communion with God by faith in view of the mysterious reality of human life."¹⁰⁸ In 15-16 the poet reaches the ultimate depths of despair. It is out of this condition that he, like Job, begins to understand what will happen to evildoers as well as how God might begin to vindicate and justify him in his suffering. "This is not to be understood in the sense that by this certitude the incomprehensible mystery of life is now elucidated for the poet;...the mystery still continues to be a mystery to him;....The knowledge of how he will accomplish this remains God's secret. But the sure knowledge that God will act in this way suffices for him who has learned to believe in the hidden God."¹⁰⁹

Psalm 88:1-8. This hopeless lament is made by a man whose life has been marked by suffering from his youth (15). He is so desperate, so full of despair because God has not answered his prayers. Things have gone so far that he cannot even ask again for relief. He can only, by his lament and his questions, cry out in the dark to the hidden God who remains a complete riddle, an inaccessible mystery.

Luke 13:1-5. Jesus speaks to his disciples regard-

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 507.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 514.

ing the slaughter of the Galileans and those who were killed accidentally by the tower that fell. He rejects the orthodox view that these people suffered their fate because they had sinned. Jesus uses the accidents as a basis for exhorting his followers to repent of their sinful ways in expectation of the Judgment Day. Jesus does not acknowledge the problem that was raised. He does not use this opportunity to defend God or to challenge Him. We are left with a mystery in terms of why God allowed this suffering.

Luke 23:46. Jesus had faith in God while suffering in spite of the circumstances.

John 9:1-40. This is the dramatic story of the blind man who was healed by Jesus. The story includes his spiritual blindness and how sight was restored as well as the loss of the Pharisees' spiritual vision. The main thrust is not the problem of suffering, but the author uses it to get our attention and set the stage. The narrative begins with his disciples raising the question of what caused this man's blindness - his sin or his parents' sin. Jesus again does not answer the question. He does not defend or challenge God. Rather Jesus responded with an answer that gives the immediate purpose of the blindness, which in this specific instance is to glorify God. We are left with an unanswered question.

Romans 8:18. As we have seen, this portion of scripture fits into several categories. It has in it the sense of present mystery which will be revealed to the believers by God at the right time (presumably Judgment Day).

II Corinthians 12:7-10. These verses speak of the mystery of accepted suffering. Paul feels that his suffering is to keep him from being too elated. God won't remove the pain even after three separate petitions. Therefore, Paul believes that God will use this weakness for a strength, contrary to normal human logic. This is a mystery.

Conclusion. The pain and anguish that we experience call into question God's justice. Those who recognize the facts of suffering but still affirm their faith in a hidden God interpret their affliction as mysterious. God, at times, gives some of his people glimpses of the future. These glimpses strengthen their weakened faith but do not solve the problem. God's activities are beyond our comprehension, according to the biblical record; but we may rest assured that He loves and cares for us.

Eschatological

The final approach to suffering is that which strives to find a solution in terms of eschatology. This perspective looks for an answer to suffering beyond the present life. The Bible includes the witness of those who

felt that the solution would be discovered in the age to come.

In the period before Jesus' birth, the Jews were a desperate people. They had been subjected to the loss of national independence, heavy taxation, and abusive and incompetent government. The Jews were tortured or even killed for trying to be faithful to the Torah. For many bewildered believers, Yahweh was dead.

But all of these bad experiences pointed to the directly opposite interpretation. God was alive and ready to break into the world to do away finally with the evil forces. The end of this ambiguous, evil and unjust world was the birth process for a new heaven and new earth. This understanding saw that night was always darkest just before the dawn. The intensity of suffering was greatest just before God's deliverance. "God must surely come and come at once, because the powers of evil have gained complete control of his creation."¹¹⁰

There are two trends within this perspective. The first involves the belief that this world and its inherent sufferings are so awful that people are driven into a belief in life after death to compensate for these terrible experiences. "The thought of men may be driven beyond the terms of the present life because this life is so unbear-

¹¹⁰Cleary, p. 5.

able that it demands another to give it any significance.¹¹¹

The second trend reflects a more enlightened concept in that the sufferings of this world are the threshold into the next. The next world presumably would be in much closer relationship with God. "The eschatological view comes to maturity in the New Testament with a clearer concept of life after death and with the view that the final consummation is not so much a compensation for the sufferings of the believers as the result of them."¹¹²

Bowker offers an interesting perspective of the two trends and their interrelatedness. He recognizes both the positive and negative, the pushing and pulling elements that helped to develop a belief in after life.

It is because the experience of God in this life was so real that the development of a belief in life after death was created as much by positive elements as by negative. The negative elements are the temptations to make use of life after death to reduce the dilemma of innocent suffering. The positive elements lie particularly in the strength of the experience of God here and now which makes it seem incredible that death will bring it to an end.¹¹³

Job 19:23-29. This passage is referred to, from time to time, as reflecting the spark of after life. It is an extremely difficult passage to translate. Bowker offers

¹¹¹Edgar Jones, "Suffering in the Psalter," Congregational Quarterly XXXIV (January 1956), 61.

¹¹²Clinard, p. 23.

¹¹³Bowker, p. 26; also S. G. F. Brandon The Judgment of the Dead (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1967), pp. 56-135.

this probable meaning: v.25f - "I know that my advocate is active on my behalf, and as the last speaker he will stand up in court. I will see my witness take his place in court, and my defending counsel I will see to be God himself."¹¹⁴ It is an example of the familiar biblical concept of the courtroom scene. The setting is a trial. It does not imply or require life after death. In light of Job's view of death as a stark and factual reality (14:7-12), this interpretation is most reasonable. It does not fit our perspective.

Psalm 49:1-20. This psalm does not direct itself toward suffering and its resolution in an after-life. Possibly there is a hint of the hereafter in verses 5 and 6. But it is unclear. However, the psalm does speak clearly regarding life after death but it is not connected to suffering. It envisions the wicked (those who were rich and satisfied with themselves and their independence from God) being like a flock of sheep before death. Death will keep them together as their master. Those who believe in God, however, will be led beyond death to exist under His power (v. 15). God will have the final say, not death. Death will be dreadful for all except those who understand that it cannot destroy any true values that have been established by faith in God. Whereas the non-believers put

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 22.

their hope and trust in possessions and position, the believer has put his energies into his relationship with God. That relationship cannot be destroyed by death as can material possessions. "His trust in the God who alone has the power over death and his hope of eternal life founded on that trust is at the centre not only of his thinking but of his life as well."¹¹⁵ We can presume that a faith which can come to terms with death can also deal with suffering though it is not mentioned directly in this poem.

Psalm 73:24. The verse reads: "and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory (or honor--R.S.V.)." The poet believes that God will see to it that everything ends well. This sufferer has learned to trust in the hidden God. He bases his hope for the future, this life and after, on the God who will reveal himself at the right time, in his own way. "For in view of what precedes, it will hardly be possible to interpret the words that follow in verse 24 as meaning that his sufferings will come to an end during his earthly life; rather does it seem that in these words is expressed hope in the consummation of his communion with God after death, a thought which would fit without any difficulty in the context of the ideas developed in the psalm."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵Weiser, p. 390.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 514.

Isaiah 24:1-27:13. This is a collection of eschatological psalms, prayers and prophecy which may have been appended to Isaiah. They highlight ideas and concepts that were prevalent in the later postexilic period. It includes, among other things, universal judgment, signs, the banquet and the resurrection of the dead. Of particular interest is 25:8 where it is said that the Lord will do away with sorrow and death. Those who are suffering will be comforted by God and their earthly rejection will be turned into divine acceptance. There is no further elaboration regarding resurrection or eternal life. In 26:19 the author speaks of the resurrection hope. There is some latitude to interpret it both literally and figuratively. The former implies bodily resurrection and the latter the restoration of the nation to life and health. It is similar to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones coming alive.

Daniel 7:1-12:13. Daniel is the narrator as he tells of three visions that he has received. Of particular note is his vision of the end of the age with its great tribulation and its assurance that the saints will not only suffer no longer but will be served by their enemies (7:27). A period of judgment is mentioned (12:2) where there is a resurrection. Some will go to eternal life, others to everlasting contempt. From the content of v. 1 it appears that the suffering experienced by the chosen people will cease.

It does not say that those who suffer and die will be resurrected. Rather it says that those who were already dead will be raised. We don't know if they suffered or not. Possibly they could be the martyrs.

Matthew 5:11-12. Jesus is speaking to the crowd on the side of a hill. He says that mental anguish and physical abuse will be compensated in heaven. Parallel Luke 6:22-23.

Matthew 10:16-22. The inference of this pericope is captured in v. 22, which states that those who endure to the end will be saved. This seems to point in the direction of the great tribulation at the end of the age and to assert that those who persevere through the suffering will, by their faithful action, save their own souls. Parallel Matt. 24:9-13.

John 16:29-33. There is a hint of an eschatological solution in that Jesus has overcome the world (and the prince of the world - 14:30) which means he has conquered death via the resurrection. This was interpreted in this fashion by John who wrote in retrospect of the event. The suffering that the disciples experience can be endured because Jesus has shown them the strength that comes from God. Their endurance and peace rest on the foundation of their faith in God. This passage is very marginal for our

present perspective.

Romans 8:15-17. Paul refers from time to time to the belief that a Christian is a member of God's family. When a person becomes a Christian he or she has done nothing to deserve or earn this relationship. The Father adopts the new ones into his family so that their past debts are cancelled and they inherit a new glory. Believers become heirs of all the riches of God along with Jesus. Since Christ inherited suffering, so will the believer. He was raised to new life and glory; so will the believer be raised. There is no clear-cut understanding that eternal life is a compensation or a result of suffering.

II Corinthians 4:16-18. Our attention is drawn to Paul's ideas that there is an assurance that in spite of affliction there is being prepared an eternal compensation.

Hebrews 10:32-36. The author addresses a group of believers who have previously undergone imprisonment, loss of property, physical and mental abuse. Apparently their circumstances have changed once for the better and then again for the worse. The writer suggests that they need the same kind of endurance which saw them through their first experience of suffering. The idea of eschatology may be seen in the abiding nature of the "better possession" (v. 34) and the "promise from God" (v. 36). Possibly the

great reward is the compensation of eternal life which comes from faithful endurance of suffering.

James 1:12. This passage speaks clearly of the crown that is given as a reward, of life which is bestowed upon those who endure suffering. There arises a problem in that it does not speak of resurrection or eternal life. There is also some doubt as to its meaningfulness as a Christian document because of its Jewish tendencies.

I Peter 4:12-19. The burden of real suffering endured by believers is lightened by the sure hope that each one will share significantly in Christ's revealed glory. It is safe to assume that this revelation will take place near the end of this age. The future glory that is assured will balance the present suffering; that much is implied.

Revelation 20:4-5. A sense of hope that God will set things straight is imparted in the vision of the be-headed martyrs returning to life. Their reward was to reign with Christ for a thousand years before the general resurrection.

Revelation 20:11-21:4. This describes the general resurrection in which all the dead are brought before the throne to be judged by their earthly behavior. Death and Hades take on a new destructive and eternal character as does life with God. In 20:11-15 there is no direct mention

of reward for suffering. We can infer that those who were faithful and endured suffering had their names in the book of life.

Conclusion. Suffering that is experienced by the faithful believer will be compensated in heaven. This perspective emerged to deal with the overwhelming suffering that the righteous were enduring. It was to balance their suffering. God may appear to be hidden but he is ready to break in and save those who suffer. There was a strong emphasis upon the aspect of the reward that will come at the end of the age.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have used broad strokes to paint background material regarding the shaping of the biblical record. A variety of strokes has been applied to capture the nine different categories of suffering. This study has been broad rather than deep, thorough but not exhaustive. These passages are among many that need to be examined if a clear understanding of suffering is to be gained. Having drawn upon other sources, I have adapted that information to form the previously-mentioned nine perspectives. The passages have been detailed as in no other source.

It has become evident that many passages have a multi-dimensional nature. That is, they could properly fit

into two or three different perspectives. This points up the continuing need to understand the main thrust of each passage as well as its intent. "The Bible is used unfairly if used discriminately, i.e. without regard to dispensational distinctions. In the study of every Biblical subject it is necessary to take into consideration the differences of viewpoint, of language, of time, of racial significance, of dispensational method between the Hebrew Scriptures and those Christian Scriptures which must be the immediate standard of revelation for ourselves."¹¹⁷ An even clearer understanding of our subject may be gained by tracing the development of thought along a chronological and cultural basis. This, of course, would involve areas that I have purposely avoided.

I have shown that a Christian who regards the biblical witness with any seriousness has a great treasure of experience to draw upon for coping with suffering. There is not one Christian view of physical pain and mental anguish, but rather many different interpretations. God's truth and strength may be revealed in any one or any combination of these views. Certainly He is not limited to our nine perspectives.

¹¹⁷C. C. Hall, Does God Send Trouble? (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), pp. 23-24.

CHAPTER III

A DIALECTICAL SYNTHESIS

When there is a major calamity, people from all walks of life, from different racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds, and even enemies, cross the barriers of separation to form momentary cohesive communities and help one another. I have wondered why this occurs and have pondered the reasons for its not occurring more often outside the context of a major catastrophe.

It appears that in the midst of tragic circumstances, people are stripped of their pride, self-centeredness, and pretense. They realize that immediate survival may very well depend on what they do or do not do. A good portion of the time people cross these barriers out of pure instinct. While at other times they are motivated by a sense of duty or future self-interest. It is reflected in the comment, "If I was in trouble, I'd want someone to help me."

My interest in momentary cohesive communities has given way to a desire more fully to understand suffering from a Christian viewpoint. The sociological interests have been postponed. As a part of this new undertaking, I have expounded the problem of suffering and have identified nine ways of interpreting that experience as revealed in the Bible.

In this chapter, I will present my own interpretation of human suffering. Physical pain and mental anguish cause me to consider myself, the world, and God. I will not be presenting any systematic theology. But I do hope to touch certain bases so as to give coherence and a degree of consistency to my remarks. It is a difficult subject and one which has many mysteries and contradictions. You may very well read frustration and a sense of limitation between the lines as I have no new insights or startling revelations. I am seeking to tackle a problem greater than myself, believing that I will be strengthened and enhanced by the encounter. At this point in my life, I know of no greater challenge to address honestly and openly than the problem of suffering.

I will begin with some basic remarks regarding myself, the world, and God. These comments make explicit some of my assumptions from the beginning and drawing parameters around the topic to make it manageable. They will be followed by the development of a dialectical synthesis which seeks truth and understanding by holding in creative tension the biblical perspectives, my personal view, and the critical weight of contradictory evidence.

I assume that I exist based on my ability to think and feel. I think and feel, therefore, I believe I am. I realize that this is an assumption since both my thinking and feeling could be sufficiently altered or distorted via

drugs so as to make me seriously question the reliability of my reason and experience.

I am aware of my consciousness (of being aware that I am) and at times of my unconscious states (of being conscious while napping). Because I am aware of my consciousness, I am somewhat able to direct my modes of being. This reflective and projective ability makes me unique in the hierarchy of sentient beings. This kind of consciousness enables me to engage in the possibility of having richer varieties of more intense, free, and harmonious experiences. These experiences lead to a greater realization of value which has been made possible by the reflective and projective elements of consciousness. Other sentient beings may have these experiences, but because they lack self-consciousness, I presume, they are greatly limited experiences of lesser value.¹

I am a part of a world that is full of polarities. One is the tension between a world that is changing and yet is very much the same. I inherited this world situation. I did nothing to gain entrance, so far as I know. I neither sought nor rejected becoming a person. As a person in the world, I am affected by the polarities of existences

¹I have been influenced by the language and thought-patterns of John B. Cobb, Jr., John Macquarrie, and David Griffin and should like to note that my conceptual modes arise from their writings and/or class lectures.

(see footnote 21 on page 17). I am free but within restricted limits. I am an individual and yet a part of a community. I am reflective of the past and projective of the future, but am bound by the present. I am responsible for the way I am because of my freedom, yet so many things have affected me (most of which I am not aware) as almost totally to depreciate my responsibility. I have being which means I am, I exist. I have potentiality to become other than I am presently, which means that I am not yet.

Through my reflective self-consciousness, I wonder why I have being. Where or from whom was this gift of life bestowed? Preconceived notions prevent me from freely considering this question. Parents, environment, church, friends, and community instilled to a certain degree that God is the creator, sustainer, and orderer of all life. I have come to accept that as my own view; however, it has not been without other considerations. At times I have tried to think of life as not being ordered and sustained by someone greater than a human being. Oddly, these reflections have been during periods of great depression, occasionally bordering on despair. It is not surprising, then, that I conceived of life without god as being hopeless and meaningless. However, I don't believe that a change of mood or emotion would greatly affect my perceptions.

Life without purpose and meaning seems to me to be repetitive and worthless. I have found stability and

strength from the Christian tradition that has been passed on to me and into which I have been immersed. It is reasonable for me to believe that God created life and by that process it is good. The order and disorder, predictability and unpredictability, the beauty and ugliness of life make me aware that either God is no longer in control or that He is so powerful that He can deal creatively with that kind of freedom and diversity. If I affirmed the former, it would lead me to believe that non-existence would be better than chasing temporary satisfactions. Affirming the latter, which raises as many questions as it answers, beckons me to discover what the purpose is for my life and life in general. It is an adventurous search and a challenging quest.

A great many of my assumptions about myself and the world are based on the belief that whatever is validated by observable data is better qualitatively than information and experiences which are not so validated. If someone said that kissing was enjoyable, then I would want to experience that for myself. Not all things in life are validated in this manner, but there is an increasing emphasis on this process. I am aware, too, that it is not applied consistently in my life. As a teenager, I questioned the values and standards that were transmitted by my parents and church. Those which did not "jibe" with my experience were eliminated as not important or worthwhile. Of course, this type of process presumes that my experience is very great in

order to make those kinds of judgments. This explains in part why I have made so many mistakes. I rejected all too quickly the things that I believed were not valid only to discover later that they were important. As a result of the over-emphasis of this process here in America, it would not be surprising to see it challenged in the years ahead. "Am I missing a great deal of better living because I want life experiences to be validated by observable data?" could be the central question.

Connected with this process is the understanding that I make judgments about myself, the surrounding environment and God based on partial information. I do not know all of the facts there are to know about any given situation, not that I always need to know. The information that I do possess is colored by my sense facilities, my mind, and numerous other items. There are occasions that I think that I have a solid piece of truth only to discover that it is erroneous. Most elements of life are sensed and evaluated with partial data. Even in this regard, humans do make some intelligent decisions and observations.

I am not sure how the world began, nor does it have particular significance for me at this point. Thrown into it, I am more concerned with my present predicament. I assume on faith that a higher Being - God - created this universe with its earthly environment. The evolutionary process, as I understand it, makes sense as an adequate

explanation of how the world is moving. I believe that God began the process at a point in which the time was just right for the nurturing of cellular life. God continues to call being into existence from nothing. God works and creates with the stuff called chaotic nothingness. This evolutionary process has involved risk and self-limitation on God's part. "It means that God risks himself, so to speak, with the nothing; he opens himself and pours himself out into nothing. His very essence is to let be, to confer being. He lets be by giving himself, for he is Being; and in giving himself in this way, he places himself in jeopardy, for he takes the risk that Being may be dissolved in nothing."² It is not critical to me whether nothingness is felt to exist prior to, alongside of, or after God, since it does not have existence or being as I normally understand that concept of "is-ness". It is that given with which God works and labors as I imagine it from a purely human point of view.

One of the biggest dangers of this existence is to fall back toward nothingness or to choose to go in that direction, thus dissolving my gift of life. That process can happen suddenly, but more often it happens by degrees. The falling back or wrongful choosing manifests itself in not fulfilling my God-given potential as a person. Therefore,

²John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 234.

stealing, lying, drunkenness and murder violate and destroy the fulfilling process which is being carried on by the evolutionary movement. In the same but opposite fashion, truth telling, sobriety and loving-kindness enhance the movement toward God and fulfillment of others and self. God's creation is good and he continues to call life and being toward higher expressions of reality which are more complex, more free and spontaneous, and more harmonious. Hence life is more valuable the more often the process moves toward fulfillment of its potentiality.

God bestows upon each being an urge toward the ideal good in each situation. This impulse is to move in the direction of the best in each new moment. Because God respects his creation and creatures, he has given to us freedom to choose and act. His bestowing of this urge toward the best possible does not override our freedom of choice. Rather it is one among many impulses that affect a person's decision-making process.

Since most of our concrete experiences of life are not in isolation, God seeks the best for us in light of the specific circumstances. The ideal is relative and the best one under the circumstances. Our personal decision as well as outside factors make it impossible to view the "best possibility" as an absolute ideal. All of these "best possibilities" still fall within God's call forward toward fulfillment which is continually being extended. The call

to fulfillment means that higher values can be realized and actualized by free, self-determining beings.

The evolutionary process is one of God's ways of bringing about the possibility of higher values. The process seems to be moving from the simple to the complex in order to establish these innumerable possibilities for the best. It is obvious, even to the casual observer, that evolution is a slow and tortuous movement extracting its price, pound for pound. "Evolution on the earth's surface looks more like a groping procedure of trial and error, with fantastic waste, than like the carrying through of a preconceived plan."³ The creation which affords us the opportunity for higher values, also affords us the chance for greater evil acts and attitudes. It seems to be a necessary corollary.

This affirms the observation of the polarities of existence. Existents are able, to a degree, to manifest self-determination, and yet they are affected by past decisions and actions. It also accounts for our tendency toward sin or choosing the wrong. God is seen as deliberately limiting himself, and man is more responsible for his part in the suffering, pain and misery of the world as well as the pleasure, success, and joy. It also means that the future is, relatively speaking, open and undetermined.

³Ibid., p. 236.

Some people may not like the idea that God's desires can be thwarted by a selfish person. But it takes a powerful Being to limit himself to persuasive forces. God's persuasive power has the ability to influence the individual in the direction of the best possibility without direct manipulation. Allowing the kind of freedom and self-determination we see in the world means that God displays an unusual, almost incomprehensible amount of power. Taken in this perspective, it is amazing the success that God has had through this type of involvement in creation. Also, this means that the higher values that are expressed momentarily in our lives take on more significance and meaning. We are actually participating with God in making the world what it is and is to become.

Natural calamities, waste, and destruction are very real and present in the evolutionary process. As I see it, these negative elements were necessary parts or side effects that occurred in the making and development of the world. Natural calamities and moral catastrophies are harmful and destructive because they interfere with the plans and purposes of persons. They are considered bad or evil because they obstruct and corrupt human endeavors and fulfillment.

Edward S. Ames has captured the element of understanding good and evil within the evolutionary process. Those outreaching, constructive movements of life are good and positive, while the obstructing and disintegrating

elements are evil and negative.

Strictly speaking, both good and evil should be stated in plural terms in order to avoid the fallacy of regarding good and evil as metaphysical transcendental realities. They are concrete, particular conditions of experience incident to an active, moving, evolving interest.⁴

He continues to point out that good and evil should be used as adjectives rather than as substantives, for they describe the qualities of an experience and have no independent subsistence in their own right. Evil acts and attitudes are those which thwart, defeat or diminish plans and efforts of persons and God. Good acts and attitudes have an up-building, positive quality which result in fulfillment and preservation.

It has been my observation that many men and women, myself included, do not live life in a forward and fulfilling manner. Nature plays its part in blocking our efforts, but we ourselves seem to be more to blame. We tend not to be enriched by many life experiences that hold the potential for greater enhancement, whether in the natural, interpersonal or intrapersonal realm. Because of our foolish, ignorant mistakes and our willful decisions for the wrong, we are diminished and dehumanized. Both Old and New Testament writers have identified this human dilemma as having come about through a break and rejection of God's love and

⁴Edward S. Ames, Religion (New York: Red Lable Reprints, 1929), p. 260, 261.

his scheme for self-fulfillment through love of others for their own sakes. The major biblical emphasis is that man has brought this calamitous situation upon himself because he chose to be concerned about himself. This willful breaking away has been called sin. It was released into the world early in human experience. Sin is separation or alienation from God, which often manifests itself in separation from the world, other persons, and one's own self. It is also the disorder and imbalance that result from over-emphasis of one or more of the polarities of existence. Sin is a universal human experience. Sin is not merely an individual act or attitude but it is a massive distortion of the human community.

Sin is believed to be perpetuated by love or concern for the self above everything else. It appears to me that self-love to a certain degree guarantees the perpetuation of the species. It is interesting to note, like the polarities mentioned earlier, that human sexuality is at one and the same time ego-centered and other-centered. But it doesn't take much reflection to recall that self-love leads to selfishness which limits the quality and quantity of life. The question arises: Is this inherent self-love really sinful? The answer is no and yes. It is sinful only when other possibilities for existence are discovered and rejected for the sake of the self. Thus an insect may be said to have inherent self-love in that it constantly

seeks to preserve itself. It knows no other standard and can't be persuaded to act other than it does. To a certain point a person shares this characteristic. He loves himself knowing no other possibilities for existence. But there comes a time when the person is made aware of the needs of others. When that person displays self-love in the face of conscious awareness of the other's needs, then self-love has blocked fulfillment for both the other and for the self and becomes sinful. The discovery can be made that self-fulfillment is not through self-love but via love of others for their own sake. The process of this "other discovery" is made possible because God is in the midst of it. Being able to see others and to love them actively with disinterested concern of the self means that God's call forward toward fuller being is being answered by a person using his or her freedom. The life-fulfilling process might be summarized by saying that we are born with inherent self-love which is good in that it encourages us to live. It ceases to encourage us when we think that fulfillment is found exclusively through self-love. To love one's self or others for the sake of the self is to move toward non-fulfillment, since genuine fulfillment and fuller being are realized through love of others for their own sake. The love of God, who is in and behind all of life, emerges in the process of loving others with disinterested concern for one's self.

Therefore, our existence becomes sinful when we discover the possibility of other-love for their sake and refuse to embark upon that encounter. That becomes the decision to live for self which is idolatrous. "The pull or tendency that operates from the beginning is to set up each one's center as the center of everything - so to fall into self-idolatry."⁵ Self-love builds walls between persons and God. The freedom to choose between these possibilities came as a result of the risk that God took in creation. It, in itself, does not constitute sinfulness, but rather makes sin possible by willful decision of the individual.

We can't be blamed for this sinful condition. It comes with existence as a self. This is the condition that makes sin possible. It belongs to the inevitable risk of creation. At the same time, "this risk also allows for the gift of life (being - selfhood) to be bestowed on innumerable particular beings that make possible that commonwealth of beings which, as a diversity in unity, would be higher than any monolithic unbroken God."⁶ So the very creation of individual centers of being that makes sin possible also makes possible a community of love, fellowship, and mutual fulfillment. To make one possible, in our world situation, meant that the other also had to be possible.

⁵Macquarrie, p. 242.

⁶Ibid., p. 243.

God bestows being or life by giving of Himself. He enables existents to be, to exist. Beings are dependent upon God who encourages their existence. He is constantly creating and sustaining being through his self-giving acts. God is bringing about fuller and richer modes of being in an orderly fashion. They are being distorted and disintegrated by the wrong use of freedom which manifests itself in sinful acts and attitudes.

It may be said that in part it is only through the combination of God's continuous call and the efforts of those who respond to that call to love others for their sake that the world continues to go on with any order, meaning, and value. With all of these individual centers willfully deciding for themselves, there exist a great many negative and destructive elements. It is through the virtual inevitability of sin that we suffer and cause suffering for others.

As a creature with being that is becoming, I have alternatives from which I can choose. I can either attain the goal of self-fulfillment through love of others for their sake or miss it. When I don't realize an element or degree of my potentiality, then I am existing at a lower level of being. Therefore, I am constantly changing my position with reference to that goal. My selfhood or being is actualized in degrees. One goal in life, then, is to keep moving forward toward the ever-expanding horizons of

self-fulfillment by keeping the polarities of my existence in balance and by loving others for their own sake. "Self is not given ready-made but has to be made in the course of existence, and that authentic selfhood may never be attained at all. What is given at the outset is not a fixed reality but a potentiality for being a self."⁷

I have identified this peculiar phenomenon of the dual nature of self-love. It is natural, healthy, and necessary, but becomes unnatural and unhealthy, perverting and destroying life. I am unable to identify the point at which this transition occurs. It may be at that point in our older childhood where we are aware of other's needs but willfully choose to meet our own. It continues when we learn, at whatever point in life, of the demands placed on us by God and refuse to accept and follow them. Sin is possible because we have freedom to choose between alternatives - fulfillment and non-fulfillment, between God and self.

Natural and moral evils are necessary and constitutional for our existence as free, developing human beings. There seem to be more evil acts and attitudes than good ones. Possibly it is the combined result of this negative self-love and the fact that evils are more easily embraced. The overwhelming degree of evils can be explained (in part)

⁷Ibid., p. 66.

by the understanding that our freedom allows us to sin continually if we choose to do so. Physical pain and mental anguish result both from our natural environment and our inter-intra personal relationships. Certainly persons have inflicted more suffering through their selfish acts than nature has through her evolutionary processes.

As I reflect upon this life, I see general areas of sinfulness - things that should not be - particularly in the American experience of being. Humans have lost their identity. Our predecessors belonged to families, clans, or tribes that had strong ties. While the larger unit had its defects, it did provide a place to develop a sense of identity and belonging. Certain standards and norms were transmitted through the extended family which helped to mold and shape a person. Presently, Americans identify themselves in the negative. They do not belong here or there; they are not this or that. This negative identification builds a fence around an unexplored area of life that is left undefined. The modern person is not able to say who or what he is in a positive fashion.

Our values, which are used to interpret and understand life, were derived from that identity as a member of a family, clan, or tribe. Since that identity has deteriorated, so have the values. In the past, there was a general consensus about what actions were right and wrong. Today, things are so relative that persons are left without

any norm or standard of value by which to guide their lives. Without the guides of the past, life is stripped of its heritage, imagination, creativity, dreams, and personal uniqueness. Life is much more ambiguous without these elements.

Our vast mobility has tended to uproot what few family ties we have. Corporations are beginning to realize that rapid transfers take their toll on the employee and his family. Families need more time to adjust to changes because of the lack of family ties. Family vacations become momentary historical rooting sessions. Warm friendships that extend a person's horizon and that are nurtured best by time and experience are stunted because of limits on time as well as over-emphasis on protocol and competition. Institutions, which have many positive aspects, have taken the place of the extended family. They do the work of caring, feeding, training, and teaching. The values taught in many institutions are questionable.

With the breakdown of family values and the lack of consistency and consensus, there have followed in larger degrees disorder, corruption, lawlessness, deception, and a general collapse of the social fabric. Not that these did not exist before the breakdown, but the end result has manifested itself in a larger degree of personal anxiety, terror, and hostility.

Coupled with this is the dehumanization that arises

from our present inability adequately to control our technology. Instead of it serving us, we are its fearful, humble, and humiliated servants. Mass production has assured that no one is an individual but that all persons have the same needs, and that those needs will be met by a specific product. The multiplication of gadgets in turn has multiplied artificial needs and appetites. Our style of living may very well be summarized in these two thoughts, "create more desire; thou shalt consume."⁸ True craftsmanship and pride in work and accomplishment have disintegrated. People work at jobs they hate, consequently doing poor work. Much of their effort is expended on activities and products which are mindless, exhausting and boring. We have created our own desire to escape from our daily lives. People speak of really living on the weekends, holidays, or days off. Work, which was purposeful, added meaning, stability, and satisfaction to life. Happiness, that fleeting, American dream, was a natural by-product or pleasant side-effect. Now work is a frustrating, movement through a daily maze called the rat race.

The mass production system appears to have created a small class of elite persons who are tipping the supposedly democratic scale. Decisions that affect us and our

⁸Jules Henry, Culture against Man (New York: Random House, 1963).

lives are made behind closed doors where money and future influence carry the clout. Laws are made by private powers to benefit private interest. Both business and government systems are over-organized and over-staffed. There is a general suspicion and distrust of bureaucracies that hinder rather than help.

As a result of these factors, people in general have felt powerless, hopeless, and overwhelmed by a situation that seems to be out of hand. "The sense of helplessness in the face of some movements or situations for which no one seems directly responsible and which no one seems able to control has led to the thought of sin as somehow superhuman-demonic."⁹

In addition to these factors there has been a loss of confidence in the Christian faith. Christianity's sense of the absolute standard has given way to a pluralistic and relativistic emphasis. Values and meaning that were once valid for interpreting life are no longer. An archaic world view and a less than fully human view of personhood (meaning individual freedom and responsibility) as subscribed to in most of the biblical record, have placed the Christian faith in jeopardy.

"For in earlier days the basis for accepting the truth of the Christian faith was primarily authority, not

⁹Macquarrie, p. 241.

the adequacy, consistency and illuminating power of the Christian perspective."¹⁰ If the Christian faith is to continue in the post-modern world, it will do so only because it truly illuminates human and divine realities and relationships.

It is my conviction that the Christian faith, while based on a tradition not without archaic elements, still possesses an accurate assessment of the human predicament and the basic nature of God. Those views are couched in the language and thought patterns of civilizations that have long since ceased to exist. I would opt for the necessity of applying the techniques of historical-critical method of studying the Bible. Blended with this would be the technique used by Deutero-Isaiah, and Jesus. They took certain basic elements of the traditional expressions of the faith and added to them new insights and visions that spoke to the developing circumstances of their cultural and spiritual situations. The master possibility (self-fulfillment through love of God and others) for man as revealed by God is continued as it was begun in the Old and New Testaments. I'm committed to God's plan, realizing that it is in the process of changing in certain areas as influenced by our experience, wisdom, faith and understanding of God's nature and purpose as well as by His continu-

¹⁰David Griffin, "Philosophical Theology and the Pastoral Ministry", Encounter, XXXIII (Summer 1972), 238.

ous revelations.

Since I believe that life is a search for meaning and fulfillment, I find that Christianity is an excellent springboard for interpreting and understanding myself and the world. I have mentioned my acceptance of God as creator, orderer, and sustainer of life. God is the one who is actually involved with His creation and who is calling free beings into relationship with Himself and other creatures. The existence of an imbalance of life's polarities has been identified. The imbalance blocks fulfillment of the person and God's best possibility. It has affected in a negative manner man's relationship to God, the world, others, and himself. Misuse of freedom has caused this imbalance which is responsible for so much of the world's suffering.

God's call forward was answered by one individual in a unique way. By responding in such a complete manner, Jesus of Nazareth was able to reveal God's nature and purpose as no one had before or since that time. This extended quote captures the totality of the evolutionary movement, man's freedom and God's revelation in Christ.

And the fact that one of these traditions, the Judeo-Christian, is thought by us to embody a more adequate revelation of God and his purpose for the world need not be conceived as due to arbitrariness on God's part. Rather, at the root of this tradition there must have been a human response made to God's causality that differed from the responses made at the base of the other traditions, and which got this tradition started in a certain general direction. This response made it possible for God to present a new ideal to members of this tradition, an ideal different from those he could present to the other traditions at analogous stages in

their development. Each real advance meant that the ideals presented to this people were more and more approximating God's own general aim for his creation as a whole. In this series of mutual responses the point was finally reached where the ideal possibilities presented to, and actualized by, one member of this tradition were such as decisively to reveal God's nature and purpose.¹¹

It is in the life and teaching of Jesus that we get a glimpse of a fulfilled person. Jesus learned from God that fulfillment of the self was attained by loving other people for their own sake. It was through this selfless love of others that God was able to encourage the realization of higher values. He was able to manifest himself to a greater degree because Jesus freely chose to respond to God. In the acts and attitudes of Jesus, love, judgment, forgiveness, justice, mercy, grace, reconciliation, sacrifice, and redemption took on a new dimension. Suffering became a conscious way of fulfillment as seen in the selfless love of the cross.

Jesus' death, while showing his ultimate commitment to God's greater possibilities, also points up our own finitude. Oftentimes death includes physical pain and mental anguish. Death has the ability to destroy and distort any attempt at keeping a self in balance. It robs potentiality when it strikes, especially from the young. Nothing can be actualized as we envision it in life, though other

¹¹ Ibid., p. 241.

things unbeknownst to us may be actualized in the lives of other people. Death forces us to see our potentiality in a sharper and clearer manner. It makes life more serious and less superficial, particularly when we have a sense of responsibility and accountability for ourselves to God who gave us this gift of life. "Death, in one sense destructive, is in another sense creative of a unified, responsible selfhood, the concerns of which become ordered in the face of the end. It becomes a criterion for judging our concerns. Death exposes the superficiality and triviality of many of our ambitions and aspirations."¹²

In summary, it is my belief that suffering is caused by the natural environmental structure that was necessary for the creation of life as we know it. Natural catastrophes are neutral until they interfere, block, or destroy the plans and purposes of people. More devastating than all of nature's forces are the evil acts and attitudes of people. Man's freedom and evolving complexity has made it possible for him to actualize higher good values or lower evil acts. God is continually active in each moment of a person's life urging the realization of the best possible in each particular moment. Freedom and the affects of past decisions and experiences have limited God's influence and persuasive power. One person, Jesus, has

¹²Macquarrie, p. 69.

captured God's aim that men and women should find fulfillment, balance, and wholeness in their lives by giving freely of themselves for the sake of others. Jesus pointed the way quite clearly in that the master possibility of self-giving passes by necessity through the valley of suffering.

From these foundational remarks, let us now consider what I call a dialectical synthesis. There have been many thinkers who have sought to hold in tension two opposite and contrary principles. At first glance this sounds like a paradox. "A paradox is not an untruth or deception. For both its terms are verified in daily life; we are free yet under sovereignty; we are individual yet social; we are body, yet psyche."¹³ This is Macquarrie's definition of polarities. Nels Ferre refers to the same idea as "'Contrapletal logic', but I am quite sure that his insistence on a multi-dimensional view of God is right. If so, it is possible for us to hold paradoxically that God is both passible and impassible without any breach of contrapletal logic."¹⁴ This process is left untitled by E. M. Poteat. "It is tension that makes possible the assimilation of conflicting experiences into a creative synthesis."¹⁵

¹³George A. Buttrick, God, Pain and Evil (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 96.

¹⁴Nels Ferre, The Living God of Nowhere and Nothing (London: Epworth Press, 1966)

¹⁵Edwin McNeill Poteat, Parables of Crisis (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), p. 13.

It is in this same spirit that I wish to hold together three elements that I accept and reject simultaneously. The word dialectical comes from Hegelian logic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The contradiction of opposites is employed to arrive at a resolution. The dialectical method also employs a question and answer method that seeks to affirm validity with acceptance and rejection, a yes and no. In this manner I affirm and deny the biblical perspectives, my own personal resurrection solution and the critical weight of contradictory evidence. By holding these elements in creative tension, I believe that a step in the direction of better understanding can be taken. Each element has its strengths and weaknesses which allow for its acceptance and yet rejection.

First, let us examine the nine biblical perspectives. These viewpoints are helpful in understanding to a certain degree the nature of suffering as well as our response to it. They had application for those people of past generations, and to a certain degree, they can speak to us today.

The retribution perspective has been rejected at the outset by almost all writers. We no longer understand that God uses pain or anguish to punish his people. It is thought to be an archaic interpretation and an inappropriate view of God's true nature. Jesus himself taught that God did not send affliction to punish people as was so commonly thought in his day. However, I find that retribution

is built into the natural scheme of things; while God does not direct it our way tit for tat, on our sins, he allows it to happen. A person may realize that smoking is hazardous to his or her own health. It may cause bodily damage or death. This illustrates the cause and effect relationship that exists in the world in which there is a retributive element. I would agree that we have matured to the point that God is no longer conceived of as sending down his wrath and punishment.

The cause-and-effect element of evolution may be seen within the framework of the Christian faith as being God's instrument of discipline and education. It is only through the eyes of faith that this can be seen. The Bible has pointed out that God chastises those he loves as a father does a son. However, it is only from the position of being a "son" that this physical punishment becomes loving discipline. "This is what is meant by saying that the religious fact is never the mere event but always the event plus the religious man's reaction to it. That reaction is a unifying activity which absorbs and assimilates the mere event and derives new life from it just as the plant can deal with carbon dioxide."¹⁶ So the same experience of suffering as endured by a Christian and non-Christian would

¹⁶H. Wheeler Robinson, Suffering Human and Divine (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 136.

have different effects. One example could be of the rock singer who has become a Christian. During his conversion he has struggled and overcome liquid and powder drugs. His music is well received; so much so that he is invited to perform at a prestigious banquet. During this mountain top experience, he rips his pants and causes himself much embarrassment. To a non-Christian this would be bad luck or fate. To this Christian it could be interpreted as a warning that he was displaying too much selfish pride.

Similarly, a person who viciously embarrasses and hurts other people causes mental anguish. That dehumanizing action may very well bring suffering upon that person in the loss of friends. That pain could be interpreted as discipline for such dehumanizing and selfish action.

Natural evils have been frequently understood as God's way of teaching his creatures about himself and the world. "There is more to be said for the view that natural evil can be understood as an instrument of God's education of the human race, for it surely is true that in a universe where no one could suffer or get hurt, there would not be possibly any development in depth of character or of personal relations; or to put the matter in another way, without the threat of nullity and frustration, there could be little development of selfhood."¹⁷

¹⁷Macquarrie, p. 237.

If a person of faith were to take a stand for a particularly difficult moral issue, that Christian could experience physical pain or mental abuse. Opponents of certain issues have caused both kinds of suffering for those who dare disagree with their position. Such a crisis could be seen as a test of the individual's commitment and the degree of his or her faith in God's priority for social justice. Examples are numerous; here are a few: integration, demonstrating for the end of a war, support of the right to choose personally for or against abortion, boycotting for farmworkers or for farm owners, encouraging the support of a family from a foreign country. These could be interpreted as probationary and evidential.

It should be noted that there are many Christians who claim to suffer greatly. They say that they have their crosses to bear. Generally this type of suffering is neither probationary nor evidential since it is over the trivialities of life. Feeling pain or emotional upset is not necessarily a sign that one is a Christian. However, it is realistic to expect some suffering as a Christian since the way of the Master was the way of the cross.

Depending upon the nature of the suffering, it is possible that it may cause the sufferer to gain a new insight into God's nature. I have known people who have claimed that it was only after the tragic loss of their son or daughter that they began to feel the depths of God's

love, comfort, and concern. This revelatory knowledge was not particularly rational, but it was intuitive. The reverse of this view is probably experienced more often, namely the confusion and misunderstanding about God and his ways at the time of a tragic loss.

An aspect of suffering may be revelational in that people experience a new depth of fellowship with each other. Surviving the same war together provides a common basis for a relationship. It is not uncommon that a cancer patient can talk to another person who has cancer and relate in a far more intimate way than is possible for others. The same is true for those who have given birth, lost a limb, or had other similar experiences. One person's sense of security in believing in God can draw people closer together through shared crises. This may be the tenth biblical perspective, but I have not done enough research to support this interpretation.

Suffering may be encountered and endured, even voluntarily, for another person. When a person suffers for another, it may spring from a motivation of love. Love desires the fulfillment, balance, and wholeness of that loved person. Probably the most moving and powerful form of love is suffering love. It has the potentiality to change and transform very poor human circumstances. The silent suffering of love endured by a wife over the mean and unfaithful activities of her spouse may redeem or change that wayward

husband. A runaway teenager causes agony for her parents. The parents can remain faithful, not resentful, open not rejecting, and display a love that redeems just as the father did in the Prodigal Son story. A father or mother may choose to endure long hours and harder, more dangerous labor in order to send their children to school or college, a sacrifice willingly chosen and endured. Suffering or sacrificial love encourages responsible use of freedom. However, the lover runs the risk of rejection because of that genuine ability to choose.

From the period of Augustine, western Christianity regarded Jesus' suffering and death as a ransom paid to Satan. This act somehow purchased the deliverance of sinful persons from his evil power. Anselm of Canterbury taught Christians to understand Christ's death as a satisfaction of the wronged honor of God. Many of the reformers interpreted Jesus' suffering death as a penalty due to sin which he endured in the place of guilty sinners. "In more recent times Christ's vicarious offering on the cross has been seen in some form as a perfect penitence which was beyond the powers of man."¹⁸ Many of these concepts are still a part of Christian theology today. They involve the sacrificial and redemptive nature of Christ's suffering which is the disciple's model.

¹⁸Robinson, p. 168.

The death of Jesus on the cross conveys to me the suffering love of God made comprehensible. Christ's agony and pain does not explain the power of Golgotha, for many people have suffered similarly and been forgotten. It is not explained by his innocence for many have died on trumped up charges. The manner of his death does not distinguish him, for others have died just as painfully. "The uniqueness of the Cross lies in what it achieves in the redemption of man and that redemption is bound up with the costly love of God. The human love of Jesus was necessary as the effective language of the divine. Is not the human cost inseparable from the love? But, if this be true, is not the human cost part of the revelation of the divine cost of love in suffering?"¹⁹ Suffering can be sacrificial and redemptive.

In America there is a small group of people who believe that suffering is an illusion. Christian Scientists, as followers of the teaching of Mary Baker Eddy, regard physical pain and mental anguish as products of weak minds that do not seek to control the immediate bodily environment. Being poorly informed about the details of their belief, I merely identify its presence within our culture. Most Christians believe that suffering is real - very real.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 157-158.

Persons within the main-stream of Christianity may not relate to the idea that suffering is illusory. However, many would confess that it is transitory - it is only for a brief moment. This feeling is particularly asserted in the face of eternal life. The following story captures an element of this perspective. Some years ago a fascinating report written by specialists in forestry was published concerning the examination of a great Sequoia tree that had been cut down in California. The tree was a seedling in the year 271 B.C. It was severely damaged by a forest fire 516 years later. But nature, immediately setting to work to repair the damage, slowly began to create successive layers of living tissue over the giant scars left by the flames. The process of healing continued, according to the authorities, for more than a century, and by 350 A.D. the wounds had been completely healed.²⁰ Pain is real, but it is experienced for only a limited time. "God will allow you only as much pain as you can endure" is a statement made frequently by those who believe that suffering is transitory.

I agree with the observation that a majority of our suffering passes with time: the body is healed, as is the mind, by large spans of time. Obviously, it is only one of many healing ingredients. However, I do not affirm that God gives us only that degree of suffering which he believes we

²⁰Lowell Russell Ditzen, The Storm and the Rainbow (New York: Holt, 1959), p. 82.

can endure. God does not give us suffering. We may experience suffering and interpret it as having beneficial effects, as in discipline or education. But he does not give it to us. Also, there is so much evidence to the contrary. Think only of Auschwitz or Dachau.

The experience of our time has exploded our ancient categories of the meaning and dimension of both human suffering and human evil. The biblical authors do not fail to offer us a meaningful model because they lacked wisdom. They were incapable of anticipating the technological revolution of the 20th century. They were unable to foresee that one of technological civilization's supreme 'achievements' in its pre-computer stage would be an infinitely heightened capacity to degrade and dispose efficiently of mega-quantities of human beings with no significant reactions on the part of most camp personnel, save the satisfaction of a job well done. To compare the death camp experience with the experience of Job is only understandable as a defensive oversimplification.²¹

There is some suffering that is overwhelming. No matter how you interpret that kind of experience, it can never be justified in a utilitarian sense.

For the majority of Christendom it is absurd to think that suffering is meaningless. By and large, Christians feel intuitively that their suffering has purpose and meaning for someone somewhere. Those who admit that there is much suffering that is dysteleological are also the ones who believe that meaningfulness can only be determined in light of the final end of human history. Therefore, they don't really believe that it is ultimately meaningless.

²¹Richard L. Rubenstein, After Auschwitz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 434.

As I look out on life from the viewpoint of my sorrow, I see so much that is just plain superficial. There is so much that is chaff. It's meaningless! Any answer to such a point of view must be clothed with the greatest realism and honesty. Of course, there is much that is superficial. So much seems to have shallow meaning, if any at all. There is much chaff. But it is only the harvester who will mow the field who gets the good grain. And there is good grain for any reaper who will work and sift through the wide waving fields of life.²²

It is my opinion that there is much genuine suffering that is meaningless. Earlier in this writing, I mentioned the murder of a young woman. No one has benefitted by her death, not that that would completely justify it. Faith has not been increased. The social order has not been improved. Her family is closer together, but that could have been achieved, if that were a goal, by some serious but not fatal calamity. With my partial information, I judge her death to be absolutely meaningless. Since we humans have the potentiality to manifest higher values, we also can display much lower values that have very little or no meaning.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, in one of his books of sermons, quotes Maude Royden. Her comments reflect the typical Christian reaction that physical pain and mental anguish are mysterious. "I never try to explain evil. If anybody asks me to explain suffering, I say I can't. I say I have a power that can surmount it. Jesus' own response was I have

²²Ibid., p. 102. Also see John Hick, Evil and the Love of God (London: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 363-72.

not explained the world, but I have overcome it."²³

Probably the most popular way of understanding this mysterious nature of suffering has been captured in the following illustration. A persian rug is made by a weaver and his helpers. The weaver stands on one side of the upright rug while his helpers stand or sit on the other side. The weaver calls for different colors of yarn to be pushed through at a particular spot. From the helpers' side, the rug seems like a mess. The weaver sometimes has to change the pattern because of a mistake by one of his helpers. But the weaver is able to add some extra yarn here and there to make a beautifully patterned rug. "If only I will work with God, simply trusting every day, I think one day I shall find my mistakes, my calamities, my distresses, my failures, and my pains woven into a pattern and I shall say, it is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes."²⁴ Definitely I would agree that suffering has a mysterious quality. There is much to be explained and understood when we share a more direct relationship with our God.

A very important element of the interpretation of suffering as mystery is the desire of its adherents to deal practically with pain and anguish. Suffering can't be ex-

²³Harry E. Fosdick, Riverside Sermons (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 254.

²⁴Leslie D. Weatherhead, Why Do Men Suffer? (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1936), p. 134.

plained, but it can be alleviated. "We no longer agonize over the problem of suffering; we make ourselves instruments for its alleviation. It is almost as though we said to God, 'some say you are cruel, and we confess that the cruelty of the world troubles us so that we have moments of doubt; but of your goodness we have no doubt. . . Therefore, we put our lives in your hands so that you may use them for the sake of others.'"²⁵

I still agonize over the problem of suffering and may all my life. But like those who don't I feel alleviating it is an intricate part of the Christian faith. God has been most visible in the sharing of a heavy load. Jesus' style is unavoidable.

The eschatological solution to suffering is emphasized today particularly in the more fundamentalist churches. The biblical theme of this age ending and a new one beginning is lifted up. The suffering of today can be endured because there will be a great place for those who suffer in Christ's name in the next age. The hope is not within human history, but lies beyond history as we understand it. The new age initiated by the return of Jesus will be discontinuous with our present world order.

Unfortunately, many modern persons, some who are

²⁵Allen Paton, "Why Suffering," in James F. Andrews (ed.) Creative Suffering (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970), p. 17.

faithful Christians, do not relate to this mythological mentality of a new age and a new world. The eschatological solution appears to be escapism at worst or wishful thinking at best. It is true that there is this emphasis within the preaching and teaching of Jesus and the apostles. They expected the end to come within their lifetimes. When it didn't, the Christian community rightfully began to reinterpret the teachings of the Master. "The New Testament itself, and the fourth gospel, also a relatively late document, begins to reinterpret eschatology in the light of the primitive community's disappointed expectations."²⁶ Christians are still trying to make sense of eschatology. How is this useful to us?

We have identified the fact that death provides us with the stimulus to achieve a unified selfhood - a balanced, whole personality achieved through self-denial and love of God. In parallel fashion, eschatology can organize the believer's comprehension of the world. God, the creator, sustainer, and orderer of life, is also the goal toward which it is drawn. Death would be like following parallel lines. "Just as, if we pursued the converging lines of a perspective toward their vanishing point on the horizon, we would find that they did not meet but that new vistas had opened out, so it may well be that we would never find any final

²⁶Macquarrie, p. 315.

point in time, and that the end would always be greater and more comprehensive than we had imagined."²⁷

It is here in this life that I catch a glimpse of God. I come to understand his desire for me and the world through studying the Bible, prayer, worship, meditation, and service. This life experience is all I know. I can only imagine a life after death. However, if I can relate to God now, it seems reasonable that no experience can separate that faith relationship, even death. When I die, not at some catastrophic cosmic finale, I hope to discover that this relationship not only continues but gives direction, meaning, and purpose to whatever is involved in death and beyond.

There is no compensation in the next level of life as in a reward for endured pain. It works out its own satisfaction in that self-denial and suffering lead to greater comprehension and appreciation of this life as well as the next. While this involves freedom of choice to accept or reject the call to become greater through self-denial, it is not a human attempt to become divine. "What took place in the Christ, who, by utterly giving himself, 'ascended' to be with God, is destined to take place in all mankind, who follow in the way of his cross and resurrection."²⁸

I believe that there is life after death and that it can be understood as another new level of living - some-

²⁷Ibid., p. 319.

²⁸Ibid., p. 325.

what similar to the present in that we will retain our freedom and responsibility; somewhat different in the mode or form that that existence will necessitate. Suffering of this world will be relieved in the next but will not be rewarded.

The sickness, deformity, brutality, and agony of this life will cease, and new opportunities for better experiences will arise. Choices for good will affect in a positive way one's ability to seize these opportunities; evil choices prevent one from taking advantage of these opportunities. A fulfilled self can cope with suffering and death. God's spirit enables one to be more self-giving. Self-denial and self-giving more often than not lead to suffering which can bring about the possibility for a balanced and fulfilled self. As we approximate that goal from time to time, we are able to pour out being just as God does. "Rightly interpreted, heaven or the idea of eschatology is neither mythological nor egocentric, but is simply the goal of human existence."²⁹ It's a new level of existence which discloses further possibilities beyond itself.

But if suffering is good, ought it not to be pursued rather than avoided? I answer that suffering is not good in itself. "What is good in any painful experience is, for the sufferer, his submission to the will of God, and for the

²⁹Ibid., p. 327.

spectators the compassion aroused and the acts of mercy to which it leads."³⁰

Whenever possible, suffering is to be avoided or alleviated as the circumstances dictate. As a Christian, the painful circumstances of life present an undeniable challenge to share Jesus' lifestyle of suffering love. If I can avoid being struck by a car, I should do so. It would be a sick and selfish person who thinks that faith can be demonstrated and life enhanced by deliberately standing in front of an oncoming car. However, to have felt the rejection of your peer group for an action that was Christian and to remain steadfast instead of running, is in tune with Christ's way of dealing with suffering. For example, if there is a social and economic outcast in your community or place of employment and you seek to make friends, this may bring peer-group rejection. To continue to associate both with the peer group as well as with the outcast is to share in suffering love.

This concludes the first of three elements that compose my dialectical synthesis. The biblical perspectives provide partial understanding and give limited help in interpreting painful experiences. I have identified the areas that I feel are no longer valid within my personal world view.

³⁰C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 110-1.

The second of the three dialectical components is my own perspective which is entitled "a resurrection solution." I am attempting to follow the pattern of hermeneutic developed long ago. Deutero-Isaiah is not the first to use it by any means, but I found this helpful quote while reading Westermann's commentary. "Several reasons made it possible for Deutero-Isaiah to take over this form for his proclamation (referring to 41:8-13) and reshape it for his purpose . . ."³¹ Drawing upon the biblical witness, I will use it as a foundation on which to build an understanding that seeks to address today's dilemmas.

There are two portions of the Bible that will be used. The first is Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ez. 37:1-14) and the second is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I hope to use the scriptures, revelation, Christian tradition, modern culture, and reason to guard against petrified fundamentalism and runaway, irresponsible change. This should keep a healthy tension between the stable and dynamic qualities of the biblical faith.

Ezekiel's vision is divided into the vision proper (1-10) and the interpretation (11-14). It is impossible to fix the exact date of this writing. It may be safely said that it occurred after the fall of Jerusalem and before

³¹Claus Westermann, Isaiah 40-66 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 68.

Ezekiel began his task of preaching comfort, consolation, and hope. This vision institutes that mission of proclamation. "It is in any case impossible to fix dates for the composition of the major promises, and to try to determine the period of time during which they exercised the strongest influence on Israelite mentality."³²

Ezekiel's ecstatic experience is brought about by the spirit of Yahweh. The spirit enables him to move psychologically from one geographical place to another. As he stands before a valley of dry and decaying bones, this parabolic experience unfolds.

The process of decay had taken its toll on the bones. Everywhere he stepped, death had been the victor. God broke the sober silence with a startling inquiry, "Can these bones live again?" Ezekiel's answer reflects an ambivalence. Dead people don't usually come back to life, yet the prophet realized God's power. He shifts the weight of responsibility back to God with his answer, "only you know." The prophet is recruited and commissioned in one act - speak God's word to these bones. It is through his message that a transformation occurs. The dead will be alive. He is personally involved in the transformation of this evil situation by declaring the promise of God.

³²Walther Eichrodt Ezekiel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 507.

Because he spoke the word, the decaying bones began to come together. In a series of miraculous events, the fragmented corpses return to their original status, except for the breath of life. With a separate command, God instructs the prophet to call forth the breath that will restore life. All life is dependent, as it was in creation, on God giving of himself. "He is in actuality going back to an ancient Israelite notion, according to which the mystery of natural life is comprised in spirit and the created world is assured of being kept alive by the ever-renewed pouring out of this breath of life from God, whereas death and corruption seize upon it whenever God withholds his spirit from it. (Ps. 104:29f, Gen. 6:3,17; 7:15,22; Job 10:12)"³³ God's promise is fulfilled. The valley of fleshly bodies is energized with breath. Life now triumphs over death as the whole multitude rises to its feet. What appears to be lost is recovered by the power of God's promise as proclaimed by the prophet.

Clearly this vision is not referring to the resurrection of the dead as envisioned in the New Testament. The image of the decaying bones represents the nation of Israel who had been defeated and transported to Babylon in exile. Those who have died in the battle are not to be resurrected.

³³Ibid., p. 509.

The message of God's promise is extended to those poor souls who were exiled in Babylon. "Only now do we begin to realize that the vision has come as a mighty answer from God to the despairing laments of the exiles."³⁴ The nation had been convinced that so long as Jerusalem stood, God was guaranteeing their existence. When Jerusalem was overrun by the enemy, it was a sure sign that they had been given over to death. There was no need to speculate about hope - there simply was none. All was lost.

It was in the face of this ultimate national despair that Ezekiel began to proclaim the promise of comfort and new life. This new existence would start with the journeying out of the land of the dead (Babylon) to the land of the living (Israel). God's action of resurrection and restoration reveals more of his divine nature - his love, compassion, and power. Through this revelation, the Israelites are able once again to enjoy fellowship with him. Those who were restored learn that in that kind of situation one can only rely on God's miracle of transforming grace. "Ezekiel does not see any less sharply or realistically than the rest of his fellow countrymen the utter ruin to which Israel has been reduced. He therefore demonstrates to them that under such conditions the sole basis for hope lies in the super-human and miraculous power of his God . . . God's salvation

³⁴Ibid.

must be seen against the background of well-justified desperation on the part of man. That desperation can only admit itself to have been overcome when it meets with the Lord of life in all his mysterious power."³⁵

This passage speaks of a resurrection hope for those who were not dead physically but rather for those who are decaying as a result of ultimate despair. These exiled persons had experienced defeat, humiliation, degradation, loss of identity that was based on geography, social order, and religious belief. It seems safe to assume that they suffered both physical abuse and mental agony. This passage deals with the extreme harshness of life as could only be inflicted by human sources. God initiated the transforming process. He made the first move to bring about new life where death-like despair had its full reign. God went out to those who are suffering regardless of their circumstances, to give them the promise of new life. What is missing is man's willing response to the offer or opportunity of transformation.

The passage points up the necessity and high position of the proclamation. Would God have acted without the spoken word? Speculation! He did act with the word spoken. It behooves us to be about the business of proclaiming God's promises of resurrection and restoration to those who are

³⁵Ibid., p. 510, 511.

suffering.

God's gracious gift - the power to transform an evil experience into a good one - rests on his mysterious power. There was no prerequisite of belief nor opportunity to refuse. It came to all who were addressed. We may guess that at this point it only had meaning and significance for those who believed it to be from God. The promise was delivered first and it was followed by the fulfillment (fulfilling action). The passage does not deal with questions about belief and acceptance which are a part of human freedom. It was an action bestowed by a gracious God.

For today's despairing person, the promise of God must be believed before the fulfilling action can occur, or that is my perception. Healing, restoration or resurrection could occur after a promise is made in the name of God. But if the person didn't believe in the source of the promise, he or she would interpret the action in an entirely different way. Most likely it would be ineffective. As I have stated, I believe that God is in each moment calling forth the best possibility to which a person may respond. God penetrates even the most evil situation of circumstances to allow for the possibility of a change. Unlike the Ezekiel passage, I believe that man has the freedom to accept or reject that transforming power and grace. The main thrust of this passage is that God came to these people in the midst of difficult, despairing circumstances, through

another person, to offer the possibility of change in spite of those very circumstances.

The purpose of the New Testament is to paint a brief picture of Jesus and his activity and to explain why a relationship with him is important. The different portions of scripture approach this goal from various perspectives. The Gospels, upon which I will be drawing most of my resource material, are not full-blown biographies of Jesus. Rather, they each seek to highlight significant aspects of his life and teaching. The other New Testament writings make very little reference to his history. But from both perspectives (Gospels and the rest of the New Testament), the same frame of reference is adopted, in regard to suffering - the sense of a victory already won which nothing can change or destroy. These writings were all composed a good while after the death of Jesus, which tends to make it clear that someone from that period felt the truths that he taught and lived were valid and illuminating of their own life. The New Testament exists--and particularly its comments on suffering--because someone believed and experienced the promises and victory of the risen Christ.

The life and teachings of Jesus will be examined as reported in the Gospels. His experience and understanding of life changed his disciples' way of interpreting the world and their part in it. As a Jew, Jesus was probably taught that the Torah was God's way of directing his people. It

was the source of the proper quality of life which God desired for his creation. Difficulties arose then, as they do now, regarding the substance and method of interpreting scripture. Jesus' interpretation of the Torah was somewhat unique in that he seemed to be directed by a special relationship with God. This relationship allowed him a wide range of understanding heretofore unaccepted by the Jewish community. Yet his message was just one among many ways that a Jew could comprehend his life with God.

One of the motivating forces of the Gospels was to establish the authority of Jesus in light of this direct personal relationship with God. By those who rejected him, his unique understanding was considered to be a misunderstanding of the real Jewish faith. Jesus gave new insights to old ways of viewing life as seen in "but I say to you." (Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 43, 44.) Obviously this new teaching met with a wide variety of reaction and response. Behind the selectively limited "biography" of Jesus stands the crucifixion. It epitomizes innocent human suffering, unjustly perpetrated by human hands and minds. The brutal death of an innocent young man captures the physical pain and mental anguish of earthly existence. Instead of being the end, this criminal's death was understood by the Gospel writers as a new beginning, not just for one individual, but for all mankind. "Thus in connection with suffering the Gospels are controlled by a

knowledge that Jesus met the realities of suffering in his own person and was not defeated by them."³⁶

The Gospels reveal their consciousness of the fact that Jesus conquered suffering and death in the cross and resurrection as well as in his lifestyle. He was apparently aware that his kind of life would necessitate some suffering. When he encountered suffering, he actively sought to alleviate it. His followers were called to this suffering life believing that it held the key to partial understanding and appreciation of this life as well as the next (Matt. 5:10, 11; 16:21; Mark 9:31-10:32-34; Matt. 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35). It seems impossible to determine if these ideas were genuinely a part of Jesus' message or added by the writers after the resurrection. In any case, these writers felt compelled to show Jesus as having a direction to his life which necessarily included suffering and yet as wishing to avoid it, if possible. His confidence in God through that personal relationship was unbroken in spite of the painful realities.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus confronted suffering. He sought to alleviate it as demonstrated by the many instances of healing. Of course, these accounts not only confirm his active encounter but also his power and authority (Matt. 4:23f; 9:2f; 9:27f). Jesus' control over the forces

³⁶ John Bonker, Problem of Suffering in Religions of the World (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 46.

that caused suffering, whether the devil or unclean spirits (as in physical disease or spiritual oppression as created by the religious leaders) emanated from his direct contact with God. It should be noted that Jesus was just as active with human instigators of suffering as he was with environmental and supernatural ones. (Mark 11:15f; Luke 11:42f.) His manner of handling suffering was controlled so as not to let the ends justify the means. (Luke 9:51-6; Matt 26:51f.) His sense of personal integrity stayed with him throughout his life, including the trial and subsequent painful humiliation and death.

Jesus' sense of power and authority was not without emotion. Compassion and control were balanced in his approach to his ministry. (Matt 23:37; Mark 6:34.) In the Gospels, Jesus is pictured as the person who met suffering head on in both word and deed, seeking to put an end to it. It was mentioned earlier that Jesus, while he dealt with pain and agony on a practical level, did not attempt to explain it theoretically.

Another important element needs to be highlighted. It is the emphasis on the devil and his ultimate defeat as brought about by the resurrection of Jesus. The Gospel writers inherited a cultural milieu that was saturated by the theology of Zoroastrianism. This dualistic religion of Persia pictured a cosmic conflict between Satan (Ahriman) on the one hand and God (Ormuzd) on the other. Satan was be-

lieved to be the source of evil and suffering while God was responsible for all the good. For the Christian community, particularly the Gospel writers, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was the stamp of validation that God was ultimately in control. There was no attempt by these authors and editors to develop this cosmic relationship in an ordered fashion. They certainly were influenced by it even if indirectly.

Jesus was remembered as emphasizing the significance of the personal dependent relationship for coping practically with suffering. God is the Heavenly Father who will attend to all of the survival needs of the disciples.

(Matt. 6:25-34.)

The disciples of Jesus were to follow his example in responding actively and practically to suffering. Their power was from God as transferred by Jesus. Jesus lived by faith. Even in the face of a cruel and unjust death, Jesus was confident in God's love and support. It was sufficient to see him through the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. God was not defeated. This faithful confidence as well as his practical manner of meeting suffering head on were the two things that would sustain and lead his disciples.

"Indeed, there is almost no limit to the number of instances which might be given of the practical compassion of Jesus and of the obligation on the part of his disciples to follow the example of that compassion. That they can do

so effectively is suggested in the many passages which state that the authority and power of Christ have been transferred to them. (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20.)"³⁷ The Gospels make it clear that during his life, Jesus had supreme confidence that even the furthest extremes of pain and agony would not defeat God. Coupled with this confidence was his naturally active response to the problem of suffering.

Jesus called those who followed him to a life that had self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-dedication at the center. Suffering of some degree would almost naturally flow from Christ's kind of selfless offering. Believers were not exempt from suffering as so often they might have hoped. But suffering did not cause life to be bitter. The disciples were taught by Jesus that a real burden like suffering could be made light even though it was genuinely heavy.

It is a miracle better than turning water to wine to make a heavy burden, which continues to be heavy, light . . . We see it with loathing when the miser almost kills himself for the treasure he carries, while he nevertheless regards this heavy burden as light because the treasure means everything to him . . . Therefore, it is by the aid of the thought, of the reflection and by the fact of being in love, that the transformation takes place.³⁸

The Master was the decisive revelation of God. In his living he demonstrated that obedience to the Father was important, even unto death. He laid down the example of

³⁷Ibid., p. 58.

³⁸Søren Kierkegaard, The Gospel of Suffering (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1948), p. 25.

self-denial that was an act of love and obedience for all the disciples to follow. Equality with God was not the goal. Servanthood was. Servanthood always included the possibility of the heavy burden. To make the burden light was accomplished through self-denial. It must be believed and experienced rather than seen. Jesus taught and spoke of faith as that which moved in the dark, which dealt with the unseen things. Probably the key to this faith was the belief that the suffering could be profitable to the believer. The yoke of Christ makes the burden light and profitable. "The believer apprehends humanly how heavy the suffering is, but with the wonder of faith over its being profitable to him, he says devoutly: It is light. Humanly he says: It is impossible, but he says it again with the wonder of faith over the fact that it is profitable to him, which humanly he cannot understand . . . for faith sees best in the dark."³⁹ A Christian does not believe that the heavy suffering is the good but knows by faith and experience that it can be carried lightly. The disciple bears the heavy burden lightly and does not differ from other men in being exempt from the burden, but is a Christian through bearing it lightly. "Jesus implies that the Christian has learned the secret of an alchemy by which the base metal of injustice and consequent suffering can be turned into the gold of

³⁹Ibid., p. 31, 32.

character and into the gold of the purposes of the Kingdom of God."⁴⁰

Certainly the crucifixion itself has been viewed in many different ways. The Gospels are no exception.

From the beginning of the early church, it was its conviction that the death of Jesus was the center of the world's redemption. It was the Christian community's belief that God had acted decisively in the incarnation of Jesus and that his subsequent death was part of the total plan. The New Testament writers were adamant about a person's reaction to the death of Jesus. That reaction was the road either to hell or to heaven, to condemnation or to salvation. Very seldom did they write of his death without mentioning his resurrection since the latter gave special significance to the former. Without the resurrection, Jesus' death would have been just one more instance of a human soul lost to an unjust and corrupt system.

Jesus seems to have anticipated some rather rough treatment which could possibly lead to his death. Most frequently passages such as Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22 are quoted to support this view. It is more accurate to see these passages as originating not from Jesus but from the post-resurrection community. The details of the events are

⁴⁰E. Stanley Jones, Christ and Human Suffering (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), p. 72.

so precise that it would point to an "after the fact" kind of reporting.

It is evident from the formula-like and detailed character of these texts, (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) which do not transmit any independent individual traditions, that these predictions of the passion with their detailed indications of Jesus' fate and their stressing of the divine necessity of all particulars of the event do not belong to the earliest tradition, but reflect the primitive community's belief that Jesus' suffering . . . corresponds to God's intention of salvation.⁴¹

However, Jesus still gave several indications that he anticipated suffering and an early death. Such passages as Matt. 8:20, 23:37; Luke 13:31-33 give weight to this view. Jesus made certain decisions which reflected his sense of direction that caused him to face Jerusalem and probable death. Simple rejection was followed by hostile resistance. The combined understanding as drawn from Mark 2:19 and 10:35-39 clearly identify his short life and violent death. While Jesus had mixed feelings about his possible impending death, his actions indicate that he believed it to be part of his Godly obedience. He does not seek to vindicate himself or prove his innocence of the charges leveled against him during the trial. Realizing the outcome, he submitted his life to God's larger perspective. It would be his death, but more.

The Christian community has understood that the

⁴¹Werner G. Kummel, The Theology of the New Testament (New York: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 86.

cross was the central symbol of the faith. There emerged the interpretation that Jesus' death bridged the gap between God and man as never before or after. The gap was created by the misuse of man's freedom which resulted in sin. Christ's action was thought of in terms of atonement.

Atonement means at-one-ment, which suggests this closer unity or restored relationship between Creator and creatures. God's action in Jesus was a visible sign of his outgoing inclusive love which had been and still continues to be rejected by persons through their disobedience, rebellion, and indifference. The unifying work of Jesus is referred to in the following passages: Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:25; 5:10; 8:32; I Cor. 11:25; II Cor. 5:19; Heb. 9:28, I Pet. 2:24. This absolute self-denial and self-giving of Jesus is the means of man's restoration with God. Access to God has been opened by Christ for all time.

There are many interpretations of the concept of atonement. Within the New Testament there is material to support the death of Jesus as a ransom, sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, moral appeal, and representative human act. I believe that there is sufficient truth in each idea to speak to the varying needs of diverse persons. Each individual must see the significance of the Cross for himself or herself in his or her own unique circumstances.

One may feel the burden of guilt and a deep sense of sin; he needs to know that Christ offered one sacrifice for sins forever. Another is the slave of habits he

cannot break; he needs the message of ransom, and to be assured that Christ breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free. Another fears the wrath of God, he cannot find peace; he needs to hear of the Advocate with the Father, who is the propitiation for our sins. One feels that Christ's death is so remote, so far back in history, as to be unavailing now; he needs the message of Representation - that what Christ did he did for us all. Another is fearful and groping; he will respond to the Appeal of Love. Another feels adrift, at variance with God and his fellows; here is an opportunity to proclaim the doctrine of Reconciliation.⁴²

This one death proclaims the omnipotent power of Suffering Love.

What seems important to summarize is that through the death of Jesus 1) man is able to relate to God in a more direct and complete way; 2) this restored relationship enables man better to understand and appreciate himself and his world and to live life to the fullest; 3) Jesus gave a model for living life abundantly, i.e., a self-giving lifestyle, and 4) death is no longer to be feared because Jesus has overcome it.

Coupled with the cross is the resurrection of the Messiah. This idea represents the watershed of religious and world history as well as the central point of faith for Christians. It is the resurrection which designates Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, initiates his reign as Messiah, and inaugurates the new age.

⁴²Owen Brandon, "Atonement through Suffering," Church Quarterly Review, CLXIII (July 5, 1962), 285-6.

The New Testament writers offer two or three kinds of proof in support of Jesus' resurrection. All of the Gospel writers refer to the empty tomb even though they vary in some of the secondary details (names and number of women, reason for going to the tomb, the angelic figures). None of the material affects the authenticity of the narratives. The many explanations that seek to dissolve and disprove the resurrection from an earthly point of view fail to be very convincing, although in the same fashion the evidence of the empty tomb and the appearances are not overwhelmingly persuasive in favor of believing. Even if the tomb was notarized as empty, what would that prove? Only the fact verified by the women - he is not here. The appearances were decisive for the faith of the disciples. There were eleven separate occasions when Christ presented himself.⁴³ These encounters were not given as proof but rather seem to be assurances given to those who already professed a faith in him. The risen Lord and Jesus were one in the same person; there was no confusion. The burden of proof that the risen Christ appeared is not lightened by the separate encounters. The discussion is shifted from "did he appear?" to "can we believe the testimony of those who saw him?" There is no tangible proof, only their testimony.

⁴³Matthew 28:9-10, 28:16-20; Luke 24:1, 3-31, 34, 36-49; John 20:11-18, 24-29, 21:1-14; Acts 1:6-9; I Corinthians 15:6, 7. This does not include Paul's encounter.

Most convincing to me are the claimed encounters with the risen Christ as experienced by second-hand believers. The apostles, like the women and the 500 people, saw Jesus both before and after his death. Many people were drawn to the testimony of not only the apostles, but those who preached the risen Messiah after the apostles had died. The experience of encountering the living Christ is the foundation on which the belief continued. With the questionable evidence, it seems more logical to suppose that the belief would have passed out of existence with each successive generation that was removed one more step away from the event. But that has not been the case. In fact, it has been just the opposite. More people have believed not having seen the risen Christ. Many would affirm Paul's observation that "Christ is living within me" and supplies the "power of his resurrection" for a changed life. "This abiding and transforming experience, grounded not on the reports of others but on the firsthand awareness of the living Christ, is what made and sustained the Christian Church."⁴⁴ The Church has been questioned on many issues, but by her very existence she claims the continuing presence of the risen Messiah. The resurrection is an experience and more. It is an event - an act of God as interpreted within the context of faith.

⁴⁴J. A. T. Robinson, "Resurrection in the New Testament", in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), IV, 49.

"The experience of the living Christ is not the awareness of the ever-present lordship of God in Christ, which was temporarily darkened by the Cross; it is the knowledge of a victory inaugurated only through the once-and-for-all act of the Cross."⁴⁵

To the followers of Jesus, their experience of the resurrection meant that he and his message were vindicated by God. The clear emphasis in the New Testament is on the fact that Christ was raised by God (Acts 2:32; 4:10; Romans 4:24-25; 6:4; I Cor. 15:4; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20). The subsequent power and authority given to him was a sign of an unmistakable seal upon his life and teachings.

The resurrection not only meant that Jesus and his power would be with the disciples, but it meant that the disciples were to be with the risen Christ. They were to share his risen life (John 14:3, 19-20). The resurrection broke the barrier put up by death. The hope of a life with Jesus lay beyond the once-feared and dreaded experience (John 3:16-11:25-26; Rom. 6:5).

Since the New Testament was written after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it is not surprising that it is permeated with a sense of a victory already won. Jesus had endured all the evil forces that had been generated by men. He had surrendered himself willingly to a process he knew was unjust. From torment and torture he

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 50.

stood only to be crucified. All of the shame and pain of the trial and cross were transformed by God. Those evil facts cannot and should not be avoided. Yet in the face of this genuine evil situation, Jesus, with the power of God, was able to transform the worst into the best, a lowly, dehumanizing execution into an exalted, humanizing re-birth. "He withdrew from life only to advance further into life, he surrendered life only to get a better hold on it, he let life do its worst and then through it showed the very best that God or man can show."⁴⁶ This suffering, surrendering love is God's power to change persons and their reactions to evil situations. Persons are transformed by voluntarily responding to the "constant magnetic power of affection and vicarious suffering."⁴⁷

I will now use these two brief sketches to develop the resurrection solution. This particular perspective is grounded in the Christian faith and adopts the lifestyle of Jesus as its fundamental model. Life is to be lived in accordance with the Creator's plan. God desires a relationship between himself and his creatures as well as one between creatures. "The revelation of God in Jesus Christ discloses clearly the goal to be a community of free beings

⁴⁶Jones, p. 82.

⁴⁷Kirby Page, Kirby Page, social evangelist (Nyack, NY: Fellowship Press, 1975).

who love God utterly and who live together in righteous fellowship and mutual service. The entire creative process has from the beginning been moving toward its culmination in the Kingdom of God. Throughout there is a mighty upsurge toward higher values and more precious relationships. . ."⁴⁸ Within that relationship each being, it is hoped, will have the opportunity to grow into physical and spiritual maturity with God and with other beings.

Human beings have the potential to understand themselves and others and to relate in a positive upbuilding manner. However, human freedom has provided the opportunity for real choice. Therefore, there have been many wrong choices. Sin and suffering emerged from the decision not to follow the Creator's plan. (Remember also that sin and suffering emerge from natural law and human relationships.) Jesus' decision enabled him to respond to God's call to cooperate in a unique fashion. Never before or after has a person freely chosen to adhere so closely to God's design. As a result, we are given a clear model as to how to live this life fully and abundantly. His method was to love God and others as himself. That involved the ability to surrender himself willingly to God. Through his self-giving, he enriched and changed the lives of those he encountered. God's power flowed through him. In his teaching as well as his daily life, he related that method of self-giving to his

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

followers. It was only after his death and resurrection that they began to understand what he meant. In the act of faithfully imitating his example, they, too, encountered God's powerful spirit.

There are four elements or principles that can be derived from the biblical testimonies which will help us deal more honestly and realistically with pain and agony.

First, suffering should be alleviated as much as possible. As it was identified earlier in this writing, there is some limited suffering that is beneficial (the pain of satisfaction after a hard day's work is not to be compared with the tragic loss of a family member). The world can do without most suffering. Jesus met suffering head-on and sought ways to deal with the symptom as well as the cause. His methods were never justified by the goals that he sought. Actively involved with those who suffered both physically and mentally, he displayed humanizing compassion.

As disciples, we are to follow his example and extend his principles into areas that he did not encounter. Today there are two levels of involvement in which we can participate to alleviate suffering. These two avenues are impersonal and personal involvement. The impersonal involvement is seen most by our ability to give money to help those people locally or internationally who are suffering. The needs are many and varied as represented by the supporting

agencies both inside and outside the church. The biblical record in Acts tells of the relief funds gathered in an organized fashion to aid the needy saints. The early disciples participated, and so should we. The personal involvement is generally more local. It is intimate contact with persons who are experiencing physical pain and mental agony that allows us more opportunity to encounter the living God. Being with those who suffer does not guarantee a clearer relationship with God, but it provides a larger avenue through which his power can flow. The Christian is called by his commission to encounter the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, those in jail, as well as those who are sick and lost. It's surprising to note that Jesus did not think that a big "caring" campaign was necessary. Rather, he saw that people would be exposed in their normal daily lives to opportunities to help. Almost unconsciously, they would give of themselves.

In addition to the impersonal and personal involvements, both of which are vital and necessary in today's rapidly-changing world, there is the emphasis that we are to deal both with the symptom and the cause of the specific suffering. Jesus dealt with the lame, blind, and deaf. He also confronted the religious leaders who were oppressing the common person. To apply that principle means that we disciples should seek to help those who are poor, because they have been "forcefully retired". We seek not only to

secure daily survival needs but we challenge and seek change in a business system that dehumanizes and degrades people by saying that they are too old to work and therefore are worthless. The means that would be employed to bring about this change would not be to bribe or blackmail the business firm's chief officer. That would not be in keeping with the spirit of Christ's example. Other non-violent, non-dehumanizing methods would be explored and appropriately employed.

The second major element within this perspective is the practice of self-sacrifice and self-denial through loving surrender to God by faith. Jesus emphasized clearly to his disciples through words and actions that those who wanted to live had to die to themselves. Those who wanted to be honored had to be servants. His call was unmistakably clear - deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. It is assumed from my perspective that a person can deny himself only when he is sure that he has a self to deny. The love of self, likewise, is on such a level that to love a neighbor as oneself would be a positive rather than a negative experience for the neighbor.

Cross-bearing is the whole idea of voluntary personal involvement with suffering that issues most frequently from self-sacrifice. It is in this fashion that we disciples move from being imitators of Jesus to participators with Christ. There is a spiritual bond that occurs when

suffering is engaged for the sake of the Kingdom of God. "There is a real spiritual bond which unites believers to the Lord and to one another in the 'body of Christ' and which enables believers to share really in the ongoing force of Christ's death and power of his resurrection . . . Such an explanation does not imply an automatic benefit or one achieved by the merit of suffering, for always the underlying 'with Christ' relationship that makes both the suffering and the comfort benefit possible is the relationship that depends upon grace and faith."⁴⁹

The ability to deny one's self and bear a burden is dependent upon the willingness to follow Christ. To follow implies faith since the one whom we're to follow has already gone on ahead. We believe by faith that Jesus walked this road of self-denial and personal involvement with suffering. We are called to follow him down that uncertain and possibly painful path. It means that we may walk alone, particularly when we are faced with pain and agony. There are others to help, but we still feel isolated. No one hears or listens as we feel they should. Our help and strength comes from God through our fellow strugglers, but it is unseen so as to make us go alone. "This help does not come from outside and clasp your hand; it does not assist you as

⁴⁹C. Merrill Proudfoot "Imitation or Realistic Participation?" Interpretation, XVII (April 1963), 160.

a kind-hearted man assists the sick; it does not lead you back by force when you have gone astray. No, only when you completely submit, completely give up all your own will and yield yourself from the depths of your heart and soul, does help come invisibly; but then you have precisely gone alone."⁵⁰ The fellowship of the faithful is composed of those who go alone by faith. Jesus freely chose to be totally dependent upon God. We are afforded the same opportunity. Those who have followed in faith through self-denial have found that they are more loving, compassionate, forgiving, encouraging, and supportive as well as being less competitive, negative, hostile, and embittered. This relationship through which God's power flows is dependent on faith that freely and lovingly surrenders itself. It is the knowledge and experience of the risen Christ.

Thirdly, the resurrection perspective highlights the possibility of transforming genuine evils into goods by means of a faith response. In both biblical sketches the main characters never doubted or questioned the reality of suffering. Ezekiel faithfully declared the redeeming word of God which brought new life and hope to an utterly crushed group of people. In the same fashion, Jesus endured the suffering and brutality of death on the Cross. Sin and suffering had done their worst in the execution of this inno-

⁵⁰Kierkegaard, p. 9.

cent man and the exile of the nation. Yet God took the worst and changed it into the best. The valley of dry bones was changed into a valley of living flesh. The Cross of crime and failure was transformed into a Cross of glory and victory. "The cross shows the actual and undeniable transformation of the evil brought by the crucifiers into the occasion of grace and warrants the personal faith in each of us that God can transform the consequences of my sin also into the opportunity for his grace."⁵¹

This transforming power is available in each new moment within the realm of God's offer for the best possibility. It has to be chosen freely by the individual believer, unlike the Ezekiel vision where it was bestowed on all who were "dead" and "decaying". The evil circumstances may not be radically changed by such a decision. But a decision to hold fast to God's promise of change enables a person to adjust his personal reaction to that suffering. This is the gist of Kierkegaard's emphasis on the yoke of Christ enabling a believer to bear a heavy burden lightly and to find it useful.

There is a story of a mule that fell end first into an abandoned well. The owner thought that the animal was dead. Wishing to dispose of the animal in the quickest and cleanest fashion, he decided to fill the well with dirt.

⁵¹Robinson, p. 171.

Fortunately, he had only a pick-up truck with which to haul and dump the dirt. The mule was alive but unable to make a sound. With each load, he got covered over with dirt. But there arose a will to live in that animal. He not only shook off that dirt that came from above, but used it by tapping it down. Thus, with each load, he raised himself several feet. It wasn't too long before that mule was able to step out of that well, having used his burial dirt for stepping stones. Behind the story is our ability to use the "dirty messes" of life to lift ourselves out of the deep holes of suffering in a restoring and redemptive fashion.

It is the knowledge and experience of the risen Christ which enables a believer to respond differently to calamity and disaster. Our faith helps us to not only endure the painful experiences but to use them for higher good. "When a storm strikes an eagle, he sets his wings in such a way that the air currents send him above the storm by their very fury. The set of the wings does it. The Christian is not spared the pains and sorrows and sickness that come upon other people, but he is given an inner set of the spirit by which he rises up through and above these calamities by their very fury."⁵² It is faith that is actively involved in surrendering to God that enables a believer to transform and use suffering.

⁵² Jones, p. 90.

A vital part of this third element is the recognition and realization that only faith can redeem evil situations. Where faith in God is not present, there remains genuine evil as a challenge to God's love and persuasive power. Obviously, there are many situations where evil and suffering triumph, similar to the valley of dry bones. Past evils that are not redeemed weigh heavy upon the memory. Some are totally unredeemable, such as Auschwitz. They stand in defiance of God and as a constant reminder of man's true freedom to choose between right and wrong. Certainly those kinds of experiences point to our constant need of the Savior and our dedication to follow him. Those evils condition to a certain degree our ability to respond to God's best possibility. But as in Ezekiel's vision and in Jesus' interpretation of the man born blind, these situations of suffering are places where God comes to be found. "John does not represent the man's blindness as being in any sense unreal, or other than tragic; but he affirms that, as a consequence of Jesus' presence, disasters even as great as this can become the place where God is to be found."⁵³ Finding and experiencing God in the risen Christ gives a person the power to seize "the raw materials of life, good, bad, indifferent, just, unjust, pleasurable, painful, and to take them up into the lifestream and assimilate them and

⁵³Bowker, p. 63.

use them."⁵⁴

Recognizing that some evil is genuine and not apparent (that is, it is unredeemable), this points to the key position of faith for redeeming those present and future experiences of evil and suffering. Our willingness to cooperate with God even to death is paramount to transforming pain and agony. God's power is combined with our voluntary self-sacrifice and desire to alleviate as much suffering as possible. God's spirit is the catalyst that gives faith its tremendous life-changing power.

The fourth element of this perspective is the hope of the victory over suffering that is already won by faith in Christ's resurrection. It is the hope that behind every cross of suffering and shame there stands an Easter morning resurrection. Ezekiel had the experience to which we are called. In the face of unmistakable death and destruction he was invited to proclaim God's promise of resurrection. It is the hope of victory as seen (with the certainty of faith) in Christ and his ability to accept suffering as devastatingly real, but not as the final word. Jesus faced suffering and death with mixed feelings, but his confidence in God was unbroken. That confidence allowed him to live victoriously and abundantly.

This sense of new life is both for the earthly and

⁵⁴Jones, p. 94.

heavenly existence. It is maintained only through faith; therefore, it is not a guarantee or certainty. It is only believed and hoped to be true. Most Christians feel that life after death will be a reward for suffering endured and faith that is maintained. To deny oneself now enables one to enjoy everlasting happiness. "If there were no eternal happiness hereafter then would he indeed be the most wretched of men; precisely his self-denial would make him so . . ."⁵⁵ I disagree with that view. It is precisely that we disciples surrender ourselves that enables us to enjoy, appreciate, and more fully comprehend this life, ourselves, and God in it, as well as the possibility of life after death. We come to understand that there is power in weakness, that love melts hate in all its forms, and that truth triumphs over falsehood. "Some types of Christianity have often tried to sustain character and joy out of the contemplation of the rewards of heaven. Now, there is no doubt that the Gospels do teach compensations beyond this life in heaven. But its emphasis does not lie there. It produces its character and its joy out of and amid conditions here and now."⁵⁶ Christ's sense of victory over death helps us to deal with present calamities because he dealt with and transformed them. It also gives us faith to hope for life after death even if it is only with the certainty of a faith

⁵⁵Kierkegaard, p. 19.

⁵⁶Jones, pp. 114, 115.

that sees best in the dark and handles things unseen. Obviously, faith is rational to a point and then it beckons the believer to make that leap into the irrational or, more accurately, into the unproven. It is here that I make my leap of faith even in the presence of a multitude of unanswered questions. I accept both the unresolved dilemma and the irrationality of such a leap. "One important effect of this has been that Christianity has not depended for its survival on its explanations either of the origin of suffering or of the existence of evil . . . Some have put it more despairingly by saying that Christians are in the irritating position of allowing nothing to falsify their beliefs."⁵⁷

The resurrection solution just elaborated is the second of the three components of my dialectical synthesis. You'll recall that I said that I affirmed each of the three parts and yet denied them. They were true and valid in one moment, then false and invalid in the next. The final component is the critical weight of contradictory evidence in regard to the suffering that is present.

The question is natural in regard to my third major component: what is the evidence going to contradict? Throughout this writing I have labored to show that there is a certain degree of suffering that is beneficial and some that is not beneficial but a necessary side-effect of

⁵⁷Bowker, p. 68.

creating this type of world. God's purpose can be achieved in and through these experiences provided his way is freely chosen. You'll recall that some suffering was defined as apparent evil because it only appeared to be evil but was later used for good. Genuine evil was the excessive suffering that was not or could not be redeemed and used. It exists largely because of human freedom that refused to respond to God's best possibility. There is no way to justify the past excessive or surd evils. They hopefully will be remembered, analyzed, learned from, and then forgotten. But that does not redeem them. There clearly exist challenges to life that are overwhelming and crushing. They defeat and destroy life and God's best possibility. Let me quote J. Hick:

Their effect seems to be sheerly dysteleological and destructive. They can break their victim's spirit and cause him to curse whatever gods there are. When a child dies of cerebral meningitis, his personality undeveloped and his life unfulfilled, leaving only an unquenchable aching void in his parents' lives, or when a charming, lively, and intelligent woman suffers from a shrinking of the brain which destroys her personality and leaves her in an asylum, barely able to recognize her nearest relatives, until death comes as a baneful blessing; or when a child is born so deformed and defective that he can never live a properly human life, but must always be an object of pity to some and revulsion to others. . . when such things happen we can see no gain to the soul, whether of the victim or of others, but on the contrary only a ruthlessly destructive process which is utterly inimical to human values.

The problem consists rather in the fact that instead of serving a constructive purpose pain and misery seem to be distributed in random and meaningless ways, with the result that suffering is often undeserved and often

falls upon men in amounts exceeding anything that could be rationally intended.⁵⁸

Genuine evil issues suffering that is unjust and inexplicable, haphazard, and cruelly excessive. I can do nothing but be honest about the world I see and experience. It cannot be explained away.

There is the thought that these unbearable conditions are somehow justified by the fact that an unemotional person is moved to acts of compassion, that an arrogant person is taught humility, that an impatient tyrant becomes a patient servant and that people in general tend to be strengthened by such adversity. This does occur. It has happened in my own life. But it is equally true for those who are Christians that these experiences cause a breakdown in compassion, a loss of confidence in God and that all of life is embittered, resented, and destroyed by despair. For example, a family loses its only child in a careless accident in which one of the parents is responsible. Both bear the loss heavily. One parent works through the grief and guilt while the other does not. For forty years this parent is overburdened by that tragedy. Having lost a good job, life is reduced by that calamity to housecleaning and gardening - nothing more. Even if at the end of forty years the parent overcomes the grief and guilt, there has been much that has been lost. It cannot be redeemed or justified.

⁵⁸Hick, pp. 336 and 369.

Only the hope of making the best out of the remaining years of life and death remains.

I believe that this dreadful circumstance happens frequently to Christians and that it cannot be denied. In the section above I mentioned evils that were not redeemable. What makes it difficult is to try to develop a standard by which to justify degrees of suffering. It is ridiculous to think that a tragic death can be justified, say for example, by so many other lives. How many lives are necessary to balance the scale for a good person or a bad person? That kind of process seems futile to me. Yet that is a frequent sub-conscious response among many Christians. The truck driver drove off the cliff to avoid crashing into a loaded school bus. That person gave his life for the children. We are moved by such a sacrifice, particularly if one of our own children was on the bus. I recognize and appreciate the sacrifice but do not try to justify it in terms of the number of children who were saved. The loss of human life is not easily justified in any circumstance in my mind. It is deeply appreciated but not justified. If two teenagers are examining a pistol and it discharges, accidentally killing one of the boys, it is not justified by the fact that the living boy learned not to handle guns carelessly. Nor is the death balanced in the scales of reason by the possibility that he might develop new hand gun controls or a special "no accident" trigger system. Even if these should come

about and should prove excellent additions to human life, they would not make right the accidental death. It is accepted as it is, a tragedy. In this type of free existence, tragedies happen. They can be transformed only when they are woven into the whole fabric of life just as the mistake is woven into the pattern of the Persian rug. I stand before the genuine evils of life believing that only through God's gracious and mysterious action, combined with a person's free cooperation, can these experiences be changed by faith. My hope is not guaranteed but it sustains me in the daily fog of life.

So I seek to hold together the hope that God will continually enter every moment of life to offer his best possibility. There have been, are, and probably will be situations where that offer is neglected, rejected, or misunderstood. There are experiences of suffering that defy intelligent explanation in light of the Christian understanding of God and the world. Faith in God is the most adequate way of dealing with suffering on all levels even if some of the pain and agony is unredeemable. Christian faith that relies on the biblical perspectives has at its disposal centuries of coping with this problem of suffering. Those perspectives are a helpful foundation on which to build. My resurrection solution seeks to combine the best of the biblical witness with an honest evaluation of our contemporary setting. These two elements are held in

creative tension with the critical weight of contradictory evidence. This enables me rationally to explain as much as is possible about suffering. When my mind has reached its limit, I'm prepared to take that irrational leap of faith. I would like to think that I've aligned myself with Job. "There is a fundamental issue at stake in their [the three friends] refusal to alter their inherited theology in light of real evidence to the contrary . . . Job has demonstrated that maintaining one's own integrity constitutes a greater righteousness than obedient acceptance of traditional norms which do violence to one's deepest self-perceptions."⁵⁹

I hope that this writing becomes another solid stone in the stairsteps that lead to a better understanding of ourselves, the world, and God. The early Christian "found that, despite the harsh and frightening realities of existence, the possibility of God was not defeated. This was not in any way an attempt to salvage God despite the evidence, but precisely because of the evidence to try to work to a more adequate understanding of God and of their relationship with him."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Rubenstein, pp. 426, 429. ⁶⁰ Bowker, p. 25.

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